ELIZABETH BESS



E.C.SCOTT

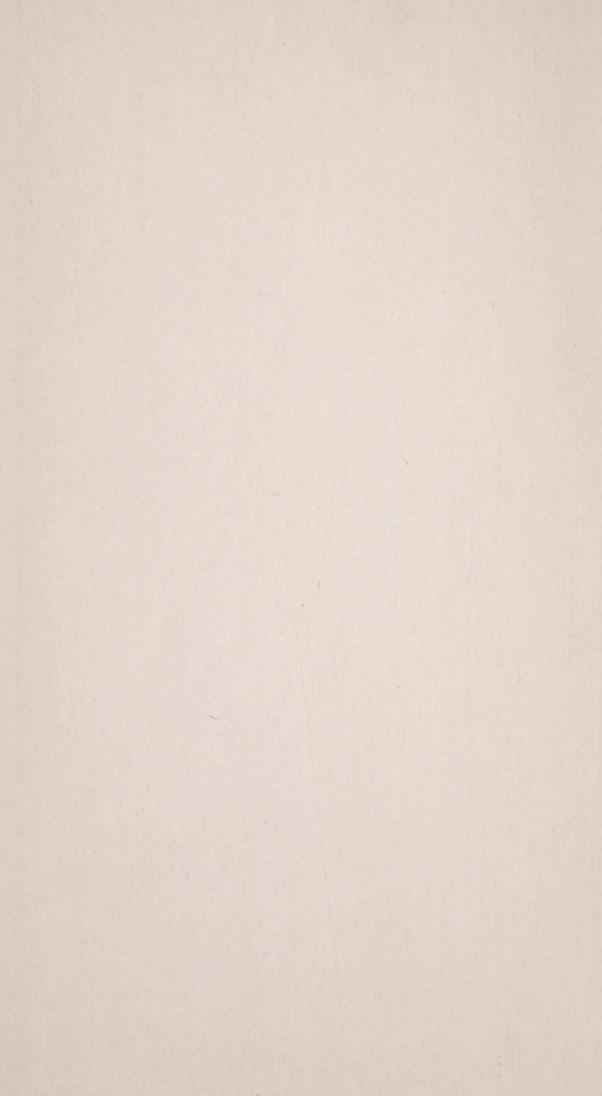


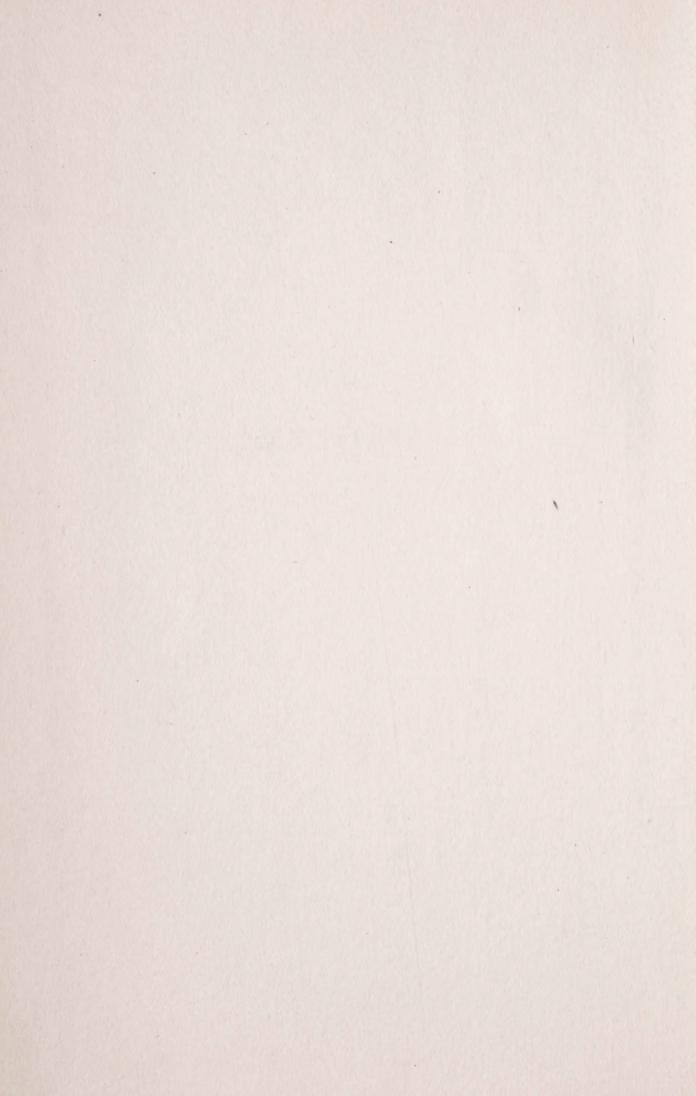
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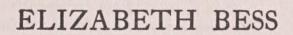
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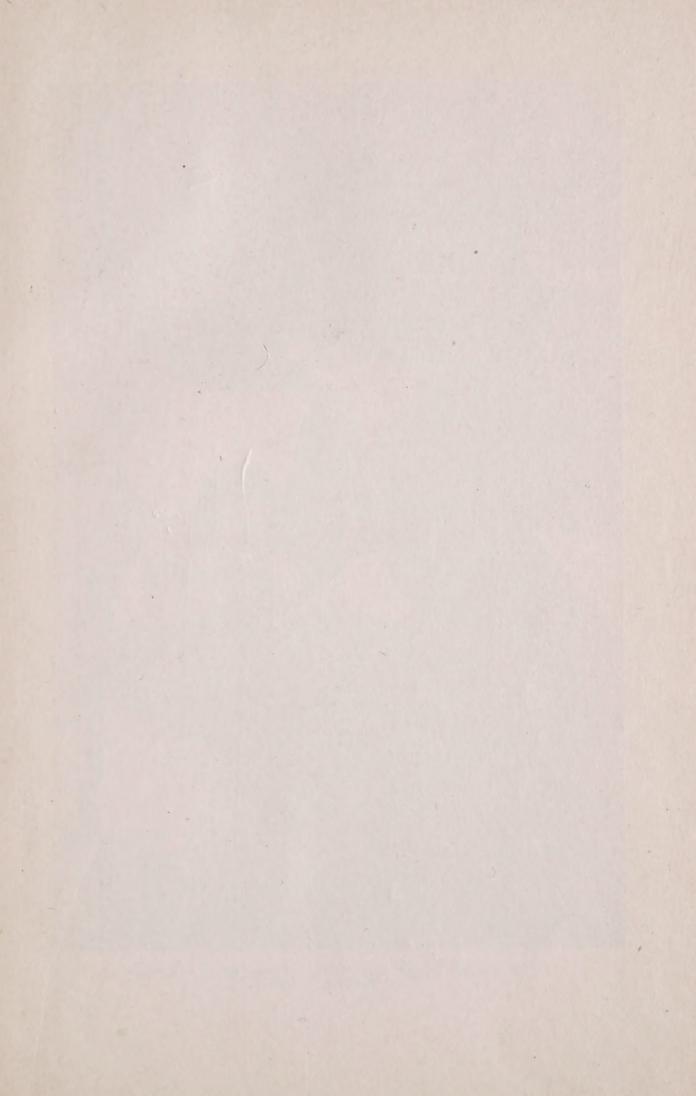




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"He — he liked me, too," Lois said steadily

ELIZABETH BESS

"A LITTLE GIRL OF THE SIXTIES"

E. C. SCOTT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ALICE BEARD

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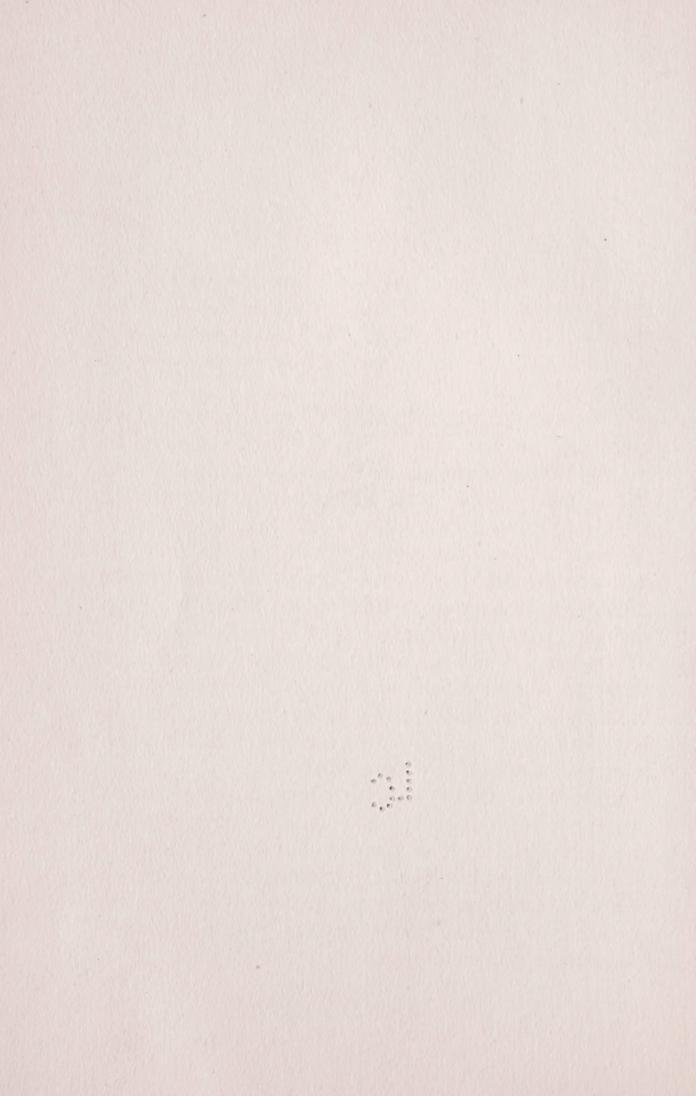
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PREFACE

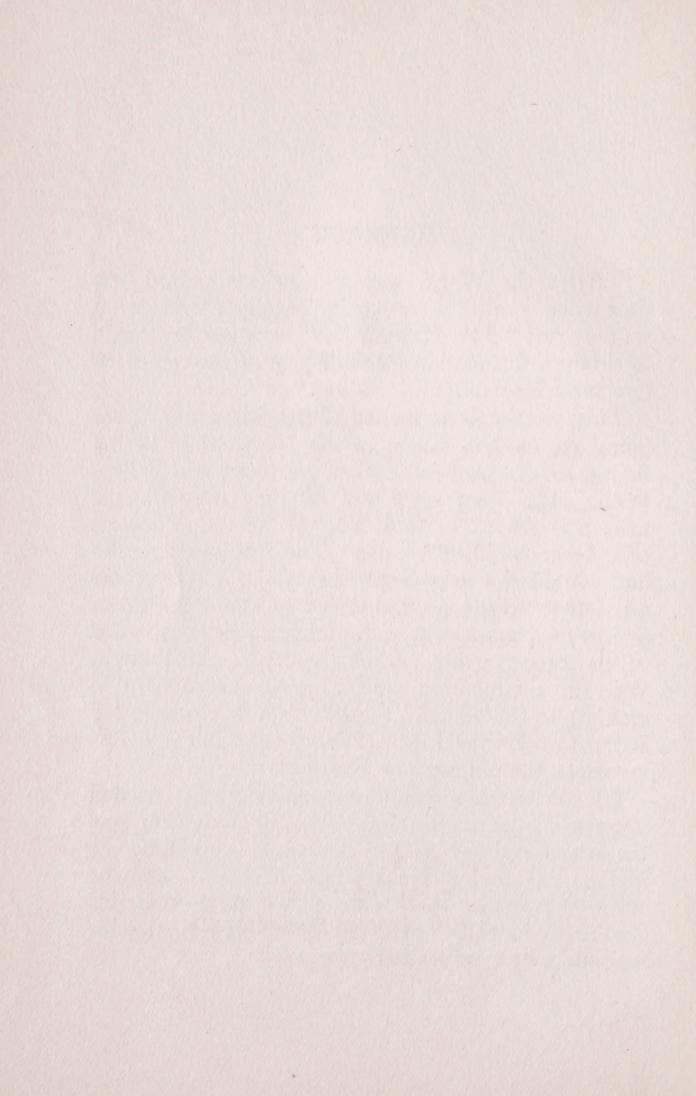
"After the War" was a transition period—a time when traditions were being joggled: when what we now call "The Melting Pot" was just beginning to simmer, to the alarm and disgust of the conserva-

tive New Englander.

This was the period when a "reconstruction" was going on no less surely in the North than in the South, a readjustment, rather, of views and values. While party lines were still strongly drawn, most men had ceased to look askance at the followers of different political creeds. The Abolitionist, who had sought his neighbour's arrest as a traitor because that neighbour had dared to stand for peace amidst the clamour for war, now felt a little ashamed of his former ardour; while the other, who thought War an abomination, and Lincoln a sycophant in yielding to the demand for it, was now ready to lay a wreath upon the Liberator's grave. But in a few instances, the old rancour persisted.

Of course, these conditions may only be touched upon in a book of this kind. It is to those who love the quaint and unconscious humour of childhood, its idyllic ideals and unthinking faith in them — and the spirit of romance that never grows old — that this chronicle of a little "after-the-war" New Englander

is confidently commended.



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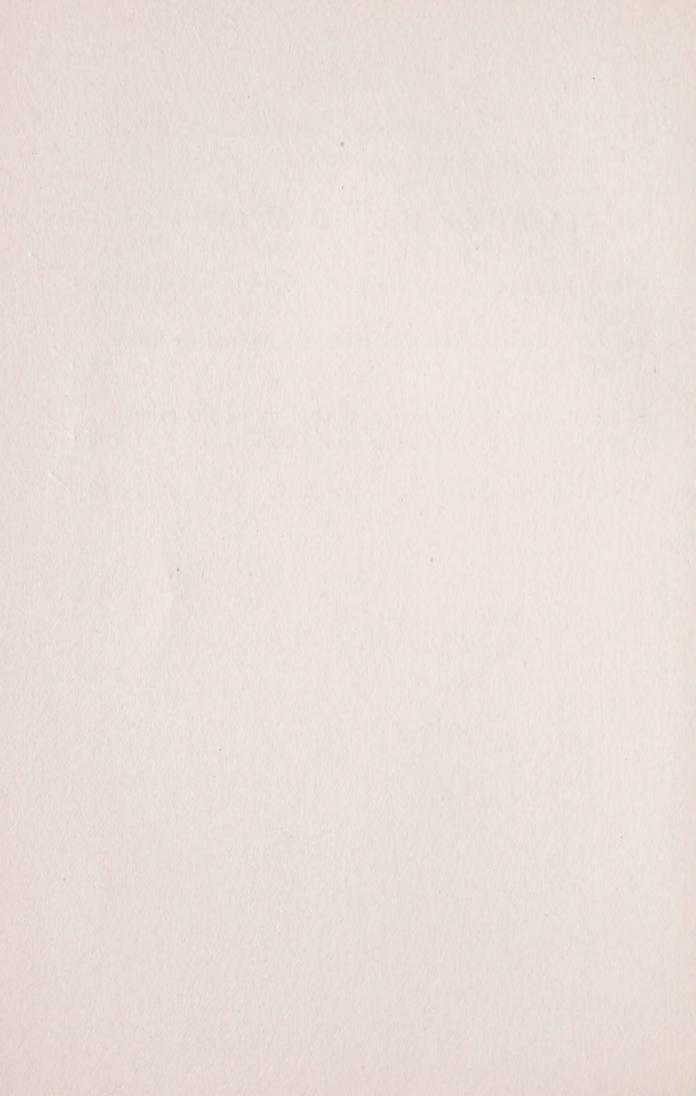
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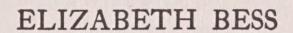
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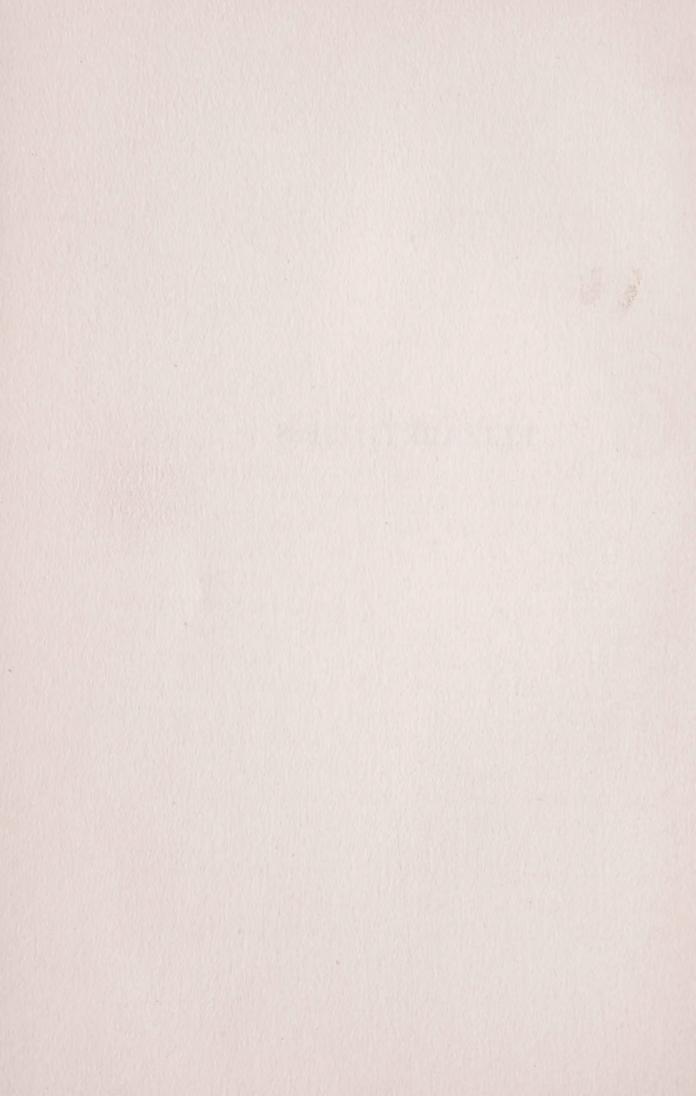
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ELIZABETH BESS

CHAPTER I

"MISSING!"

ROWN folks are funny! They are always doing queer, interesting things, if given half a chance. All you have to do is to let them think they are alone, and you can almost al-

ways count on a new experience!

This was especially true of Cousin Winnie, who lived in New York and had come to spend the holidays with the Bradfords. In the first place, she was so delightfully pretty and young ladyish! And if you sat under the high bed with the valance, and applied your eye to the little cut-out place where the valance rounded the post (of course, this happened only on the rare occasions when there was no other way out of being caught "snoopin' round," as William called it), it was better than Godey's Lady's Book pictures when she came in and began to fix her hair and primp before the glass.

Cousin Winnie's toilet articles were an endless source of interest, too, second only to her jewel case, with its rings and pins and bracelets and chains. And to see her twisting one of the long, brown curls

around her finger or, with plump arms gracefully upraised, pinning them all in a bunch at the back of her head!

And when she would plait up a ribbon with twinkling fingers — holding it up to her face, to match it with her roseleaf skin — and then pin it among the curls where it would do the most execution (provided there was anything to execute, in this deadly dull little place) the artist's heart in little Elizabeth Bradford—nicknamed "Elizabeth Bess" from an old rhyme — thrilled with ecstasy!

Christmas was three days past, and therefore ancient history. Its sweets had begun to cloy, and its toys to pall; so the little one hunted up her inherited dolls which had been cast into the limbo of the hall closet, and took them into the parlour, where a cosy fire was burning in the big, urn-topped stove. Tiptoeing to the mantel then, she took down a framed picture of a soldier in uniform and, standing it against the table leg, began talking to it and weaving romance about it, as was her custom. She had been forbidden to take down the picture since one unfortunate day when she had dropped it and broken the glass; and now, hearing Mother and Cousin Winnie approaching, and the latter's bedroom door being more easily accessible than the high mantel, the little girl caught up dolls and picture and disappeared with them under the valanced bed.

The two women had their sewing with them, and Mother's needle began to fly industriously. Cousin Winnie's sewing was never a momentous matter; she

could drop it without a qualm!

So now, after a few busy minutes, she yawned, laid her sewing on the table and, with her slender hands clasped behind her, began making the round of the room, examining the pictures and ornaments, and humming "Jane, My Pretty Jane!" as she progressed.

Stopping at the little corner stand whereon stood the Bible, Cousin Winnie opened it and began turn-

ing the leaves.

"Elizabeth Bradford."

Her name, impressively spoken, caused the child to start so violently that she bumped her head against the bed slats. Then, "It doesn't seem possible that she's five years old!" Cousin Winnie added, and the little eavesdropper breathed again.

"Howell Harlan Bradford . . . Missing after Gettysburg, July 3d, 1863," the voice trailed off

into silence — a queer silence.

Elizabeth Bess caught up the soldier's picture, and holding it to the little cut-out place in the valance, where the light fell, examined it critically.

"Missing," she whispered to herself. "Miss-

ing." Now, what in the world did that mean?

"Yes," Mother answered after a pause. "It's

been nearly four years!"

Ah! That was what it meant, then! Mother's voice told the story. It meant that Howell was dead. But, if they meant dead, why didn't they say so? Such quibbling! Just as if it would make him any less dead to call it by another name! Her poor Howell! She took up the picture, and kissed it with unction.

The stress of her feelings, coupled with a slight cold, caused the child to sniff, whereat the game was up.

"Elizabeth Bradford, where are you?" called Mother sternly. And the little thing crawled ab-

jectly from under the bed.

"Go out into the kitchen, and stay there till I come. I'm ashamed of you, you little eavesdrop-

per!"

The eavesdropper, with drooping head, carrying the picture behind her back, slipped out into the hall. There her head went up, and she skipped triumphantly. For had she not hoodwinked the elders? Of course they could not see the picture, when it was behind her back!

Her brother, William, was sitting at the kitchen table, poring over a lot of illustrated newspapers that Cousin Winnie had brought from New York. These were the first the children had seen, and were a source of great pleasure to them. Slipping the picture into the table drawer, until she could return it to its place, Elizabeth Bess also took up a paper; but it lacked its usual appeal.

"Wee-um, what is 'Missing'?" she asked pres-

ently.

"Why? What do you want to know for?" he

countered curiously.

"'Cause Howell is. Is it another name for dead? Cousin Winnie just read it out of the Bible. It said, 'Howell Harlan Bradford missing after breakfast, July 30, 1863.'" She said this all in a breath, expecting an appreciation of her smartness.

But William only wrinkled up his brows, and stared

at her uncomprehendingly.

"Stop looking at me like that, Wee-um Bradford! You go look in the Bible and you'll see it for your-

self!" she said truculently.

"Oh, no! I won't see any such stuff as that in the Bible," William contradicted. Suddenly light dawned on him, and he started to laugh; but he changed his mind in view of his sister's seriousness - the seriousness of the whole thing, in fact.

"I know what it said," he told her, as man to man. "It said 'Missing after Gettysburg,' not after 'breakfast.' That was a big battle that How-

ell was in."

"Oh, was it?... But, Wee-um, what is 'miss-ing'?" she persisted. "What does it mean?" "Why, it means — it means when anything can't

be found. Remember that time when you couldn't find your kitten for two or three days? Well, that was missing!"

"But it came back!" she cried. "It wasn't dead. O-oh! Why didn't somebody tell me that Howell is coming back? I thought he was dead,

and he's only missing!"

"Why!" William began, and stopped, at a loss. Looking up, he saw Mother standing in the doorway where she had been listening. "You tell her, Mother," said he, relieved.

"We didn't tell you, Child, because we are not sure that he is coming back. We think, dear, that your brother Howell is in Heaven," said Mother

gently.

"But he isn't, Mother! If he was dead the Bible'd say he was dead! The Bible doesn't tell stories — does it?" she demanded.

"But, dear, the Bible itself doesn't say so. Father wrote it in the Bible. It means —" But no

further explanation was needed.

"Well, I guess if my father wrote it, it's so! I guess my father doesn't tell stories, either!" and the child looked from one to the other of her auditors,

challenging contradiction.

It seemed to Mother that there was nothing more to be said. William did not think so. He stood looking oddly at Mother; but she evaded his glance, and left the room, whereupon he returned to his papers. And his sister, after another triumphant declaration that Howell was coming back, returned to hers.

"... Wee-um, what's a eavesdropper?" was the question that recalled William from Norway, just as the champion of the world was finishing a race on skates.

"For pity's sake, get a dictionary!" cried William in disgust. Then, seeing how hurt the little one looked, he relented. Suspecting a guilty conscience at the bottom of the inquiry, a twinkle crept into his eye as he answered, "You're an eavesdropper, Lizabeth Bess! It's somebody who goes snoopin' round, a-peeking and a-listening to what's none of their business. Now, do you know?"

The child wilted before this sweeping arraignment. It seemed so much worse than Mother's reproof that she bent her head over the paper and the

red crept up into her cheeks. Then she put her elbow on the table and shaded her eyes with her hand.

William, who could interpret his little sister's actions down to the play of a muscle, felt that he had gone too far. "Cracky!" he cried, snatching up a paper, and burying his nose in it. "See here, Lizabeth Bess, d'you see this? Here's about a lot of dolls dressed up like Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth and the Empress Eugenie that's to be sold for poor orphant children! Come on, and I'll read it to you."

Lizabeth Bess hated to "come on" after her snubbing, but the doll queens, especially Elizabeth, were not to be resisted. . . . "What's orphant children, Wee-um? Are we? 'Cause I'd love to have this one," pointing to a be-ruffed Mary, Queen of Scots. "And which is Queen Lizabeth?"

"Well, I guess we're not! Orphants have no father or mother. These are soldiers' orphants, and they all live in a big house called a 'Home.'"

"Well, so do I live in a big house called a home. And so am I a sholdier's orph - Oh, no! But I'm a sholdier's little sister. They ought to give me one, Wee-um!"

William felt that life was too short to argue the matter; and just then Elizabeth Bess found some-

thing else to interest her:

"See here, Wee-um, see this man in a big sholdier's coat, with a little baby in his arms. Do you s'pose he's a truly sholdier, or only a tramper, like the one Mother gave dinner to the other day."

"Let's see," said William, taking the paper. "Why, yes, he's a soldier. And what d'you think he did? He went into a house that was all afire, and brought out that baby. Every one else was afraid to go in, and the baby'd have burned up only for him. Wasn't he brave?"

"I sh'd think he was! What was his name, Wee-

um?"

"Let's see: Why, isn't this funny! He didn't know his own name — or where he lived, or anything. The paper thinks he got hit on the head in the war, and that's why he can't remember. They call him 'Lestrange,' just so's he'll have some name. Isn't it funny!"

"Huh!" scoffed the little sister. "I been hit on

the head lots o' times, and I can remember!"

"Maybe you couldn't if a cannon-ball had hit you on the head!"

"He doesn't look as if a cannon-ball had hit him," observed the critic, wiser than she knew. She

studied the picture carefully.

"... Wee-um Bradford, do you know what I think? Well, I think that's Howell!" William checked an exclamation. "Yes, sir! That coat's just 'zactly like his coat in his picture. 'N' his

hair's curly, 'n' he's thin, 'n'-"

"This isn't a truly likeness, like the one we have of Howell," William explained patiently. "Somebody drew this, just as you draw pictures on your slate. Howell is — well, it isn't him," he added with ungrammatical finality, "and that's all there is about it!"

"Well, anyway," she was insisting, but William pushed away the papers, and went hastily into the buttery, where Mother was skimming the milk, and shut the door after him.

"I don't know what's got into Lizabeth Bess to-day," he complained, and told her the story of the pictured "sholdier." "Why didn't you tell her the truth right out, Mother? We won't have any peace now, till you do!"

"Oh, I guess she'll forget about it in a few days,"

Mother said, dismissing the matter.

"No she won't! She never forgets anything!"

"She seemed so happy over her 'discovery,' that I couldn't bear to throw cold water over it," said Mother tremulously.

That night, when everybody else was in bed, Mother hunted up the paper containing the article, and although the incident had occurred weeks before, she wrote a letter to the mayor of the place mentioned, asking if he could give her any information of the soldier-hero.

"'Out of the mouths of babes," she said softly to herself.

So do mothers, as well as drowning men, grasp at a straw!

CHAPTER II

"NO WEE ONE, NO PARTY!"

IFE, to Elizabeth Bess Bradford, had taken on a livelier aspect since yesterday. All day vague hints of something unusual had been floating about,—tantalisingly, delightfully indefinite!

Could it be that Howell was coming home to-day? Had the "little bird," Mother's faithful informant, told her so? Was that why she was putting new lace in her black silk dress, and looking unusually animated?

And Cousin Winnie had brought out her lovely, lovely pink silk with the beaded trimming, and asked Mother if she should wear it. "Oh, no!" Mother had answered. "That's too fine for Green Hills. Wear the crimson merino that you wore Christmas Day."

Catching Mother alone, her small daughter ven-

tured to ask her a question.

"Howell coming home to-day?" repeated Mother, startled out of her calm. "Child, he isn't coming home at all!" But seeing the little one's disappointment, she amended: "At least, I don't think he is. Now, don't think about it any more — if he comes, he'll be here, and you'll know it."

If he came he'd be here, and she'd know it! Now wasn't that a smart thing to say! Elizabeth Bess wondered at Mother. She would go and find William, who did not treat her like a little child.

As she stood in the back entry, watching the chickadees eating the fat pork placed for them on the apple-tree branch, she heard Cousin Winnie come into the kitchen and say to Mother, "Aunt Anne, is the child going to-night?" And Mother replied, "Oh, no; she's going to stay at home with the other children."

Just then William came in, and made a diversion, — William, who was twelve — a little more than twice his sister's age, and her pride and joy. Even her parents were no dearer to her than this "big" brother. So, when he got out the "Walking Zouave" that Cousin Winnie had brought her for Christmas, and told her to sit at the other end of the table and turn him around when he got there, she took her place like a stoic, although she hated and feared the Zouave. What with the fierce stare of his bold eyes as he came striding down the table toward her (this was after William had inserted a key in his baggy blouse and wound him up) — and the black blackness of his moustache and imperial, it was all she could do to keep from jumping up and running from the room.

Now, so intent was she upon what Mother had said about her "staying at home with the other children," that she forgot to turn the warrior around at the table end and so he fell off onto the floor, his insides still horribly rumbling and purring, and his

mailed feet impotently kicking as he glared up at her.

"Pick him up, Lizabeth Bess!" cried William, seeing her shrink back.

"No, Wee-um, I won't pick him up - and don't

you!" she protested.

"Aw, come on. Watch out for him this time!" So she watched out, and turned the monster when he approached, but her thoughts were not on him. So she was to stay at home with the other children, was she? And what was it that she was going to stay away from? Well, that didn't make any difference, since she was going to stay away. And she wasn't going to ask. Mother was always telling her to deny herself, and she guessed she could.

All the same, it was pretty hard to bear, and Mother not even to tell her about it. She was preparing to take refuge in the "spare chamber"—her retreat in time of stress—when a familiar step sounded on the porch, and with a brisk "Happy

New Year!" in came "Chinney."

"Happy New Year, Mr. Cheney!" replied everybody but the little girl who, at that moment, was

afraid to trust her treacherous under lip.

Now Mr. Cheney, a near neighbour of the Bradfords, was the child's particular friend and champion, as she was his especial pet. It was he who had christened her "The Wee One," when she "wasn't as big as a pint of cider," and as she was still small and slight, the title survived.

And she had given him a nickname — oh, long ago, when she was little! "P-o-o-r Chinney!" she

would say, stroking his red curls. She said it now, perched on his shoulder. Rather, she breathed it into his ear, lest William, or her big sister Sara,

hearing, should laugh and call her a baby.

"Well, Mrs. Bradford," began the visitor, "I was charged to tell you all to come early. And that doesn't mean six o'clock. The supper is to be at 6.30, and you'll want time to get warmed up beforehand. It's going to be a cold night."

Elizabeth Bess was instantly alert. "Come where, Chinney? And who's coming?" she asked.

"You are, for one. What? Didn't they tell you you were coming up to Chinney's house to-night,

to eat the New Year's turkey?"

"Oh, no, no, Mr. Cheney," Mother hastily interposed. "She's going to stay at home with the other children to-night. They're going to pop corn, and make molasses candy. This isn't to be a children's party, dear. Mrs. Cheney has asked only grown folks."

"It's going to be one child's party," Chinney answered with finality. "The Wee One has got to

be there. No Wee One, no party!"

The elders laughed, and no more was said. But the child was satisfied. Chinney was a great joker, but when he said a thing like that —" No Wee One,

no party!" that settled it - she was going.

Noon came, and the small hours of afternoon, but no more was said about her going. Mother and Cousin Winnie put on their pretty dresses, and Mother told "Gran" to put on her black, lilacsprigged silk. But her, Elizabeth Bess, they changed into a clean little faded delaine. When she protested, Mother said (with the usual quantities of gentleness and firmness nicely mixed): "But you're not going, dear. Mr. Cheney was only joking. You and Sara and William are going to have a nice party at home."

Still the child did not cry. Indeed, she was surprised at her own bravery. She went into Gran's room, where the old lady was preparing to don the lavender-sprigged silk, and in a voice pitched high to penetrate her partial deafness, remarked:

"You needn't dress up, Gran - there isn't going

to be any party at Chinney's house to-night."

"Wh-what do you mean, child?" Gran asked in alarm. "Why, we're all invited — your father and

mother, and Cousin Winnie and me!"

"And me," amended Elizabeth Bess with calm dignity. "But it doesn't make any difference—Chinney said if I wasn't there, there wouldn't be any party—and I ain't a-going!" she ended quickly, and made a hasty retreat to the window, where she jammed her ridiculous chin against the glass, to keep it still.

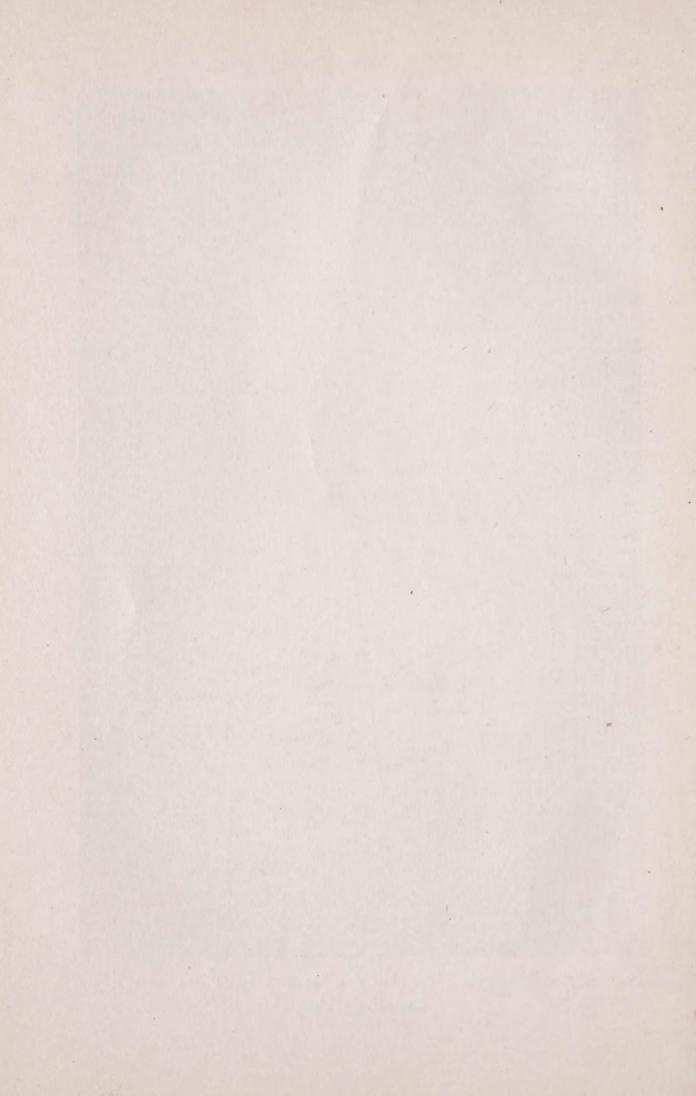
Gran sat down weakly, the lilac-sprigged dress across her lap. Parties, even little parties, didn't come every day, and this invitation had meant a good deal to her. "I guess he was only fooling, child," she said hopefully, but her listener fancied that she saw Gran's chin quiver now.

"He wasn't; he said 'No Wee One, no party!' just like that. And I guess you'll all feel pretty

funny when you get up there."



But her Elizabeth Bess they changed into a clean little faded delaine



"What did Mother say about your going?" Gran

moistened her lips to ask.

"She just said it wasn't a child's party, and that I couldn't go. I thought — I thought when Chinney said that that she'd let me, but — everybody's getting dressed up but me, and I ain't a-going!" Again she darted to the window, and there was a long silence in the room. It was broken at length by a little laugh from Gran, at which Lizabeth Bess turned, fiercely questioning.

"I wasn't laughing at you, dear," said the old lady placatingly. "I was just thinking of something that happened to me when I was a little girl about

your size. You reminded me of it."

"I don't see how I reminded you of anything

funny. I don't feel funny."

"Well, you did. Come here, and I'll tell you about it, if you like." There was a certain craftiness in the look the old lady bent upon the child, say, rather, upon the other child. She pushed the silk dress off her lap, and took up her youngest descendant, who was rather pessimistic regarding the line of entertainment offered.

"Yes, I was about your size," she ruminated, "and my mother had promised me a new bonnet the next time she went to town. She said if I was a good little girl she would take me along, and let me choose it for myself.

"Well, I was a good girl, just like you. I helped my mother with the dishes, and I minded the baby, and I did — oh! dozens of things. But when the

time came, she wouldn't let me go."

The child hitched around where she could look into Gran's eyes, and note every expression. This

was getting interesting.

"You see, she had to go on some errand sooner than she expected, so she wasn't prepared to take me. But I tell you I was disappointed! I had counted so much on it, and worked so hard for it, that I felt I was being cheated. So I just made up my mind that I would go — and I did!"

"Oh, Gran! How did you do it?"

"Well," answered Gran, with another guileful side glance at her auditor, "when Mother went to get ready, I went and put on my best dress. Father was going too, to sell some apples and potatoes. He put them in bags in the back of the sleigh, and covered them over with blankets to keep them from freezing. Then, when he came in to get Mother, I slipped out, and got under the blankets with the apples and potatoes."

"Gran Bradford!"

"I did, so! I wasn't going to be cheated out of my rights! But I was in a terribly cramped position, there among the sacks, and it was mighty stuffy! One of my feet went to sleep, and it seemed as if I must wiggle it, or die."

"Did you wiggle it?"

"I did. And that came near being the end of my trip. The movement raised a dust, and I had to cough, and—" but Gran had to laugh again at the recollection.

"Go on, Gran!"

"Mother was for sending me straight back home. I don't remember just what she said, but anyway, it hurt my feelings, and I began to cry. Then Father came to my relief — said that I had been promised my bonnet, and that I should have it. And I guess Mother herself hadn't the heart to make me walk back home in the cold and snow; so they took me to town, and I got my bonnet."

Elizabeth Bess breathed a deep sigh, expressive of many emotions. Presently she slipped down off Gran's lap. "I guess I'll go now, and let you change your dress," she said. "Maybe you'd better change it, for there might be a party, after all. Mother's put on her pretty new dress, so you might as well. Good-bye, Gran." She opened the door a little way again, and peered solemnly around it to

say, "You never can tell!"

Left alone, the grandmother began to array herself, albeit with hands that trembled. . . . Supposing? . . . And then again, supposing? But when her daughter-in-law came in to hurry her up, she dropped her misgivings like a garment. Father came in a little later to escort her out to the sleigh, where he tucked her into the back seat beside Cousin Winnie. He and Mother took the front seat, and they were off.

As they started, Mother craned her neck to wave good-bye to the little group standing in the open doorway, from which the early lamp-light was streaming. But only Sara and William were there—the youngest one was not in sight. Mother

looked at the window of the spare chamber, expecting to see a doleful small face peering out, but there was none.

"Poor little thing!" she said wistfully. "I expect she's up in the old cradle in the garret, crying. I suppose we might have taken her! She's always good, at home or abroad."

"Well, why didn't you take her?" Father asked with some warmth. "It's too late now, but next

time the child is invited, she's going!"

Their hospitable hosts met them at the door, and

the first question was for little Bess.

"Well, if that isn't too bad!" exclaimed Mrs. Cheney, in answer to her neighbours' somewhat lame

excuses. "Of course we expected her!"

"It's so bad that it'll have to be made good!" said Chinney, reaching for his overcoat. "Now you needn't say a word, any of you — I'm going after the Wee One!"

But even as he shouldered into his coat the threat was discounted. The hall door opened softly, and a little figure with a long shawl trailing after it, and

some oat straws in its hair, slipped in.

Everybody shouted a welcome, except Gran. That old conspirator, pale and guilty, hastily sought a chair. But she need not have feared — the child was no tattle-tale. Ignoring the rest, she put her little hands in Chinney's, and looked up at him with radiant eyes.

"You can have your party now, Chinney: I've

come!" said she.

CHAPTER III

"AND ALL IS VANITY!"

HE Bradfords' nearest neighbours were the Hortons: a family a round dozen strong, when you counted in Grandsir and Grandma Hart who lived with them; and one that loomed large on Lizabeth Bess's horizon, in more ways than one: "Burfa," the youngest, was her own age, and her devoted friend. Then came a number of small fry with whom she had little to do. Charlie and Sallie, the fifteen-year-old twins, were the objects of a qualified regard.

Charlie, "Bunt," as was his nickname, would have been a passable person but for the fact that he was always making fun of her, and "mocking" (mimicking) her; and then he called William "Billy," an indignity second only to that of calling father "your

old man," as had once happened.

Sallie was always running in on the way to school, and waiting for Sara, who was about her own age; and at such times, the youngest might have been her own old rag doll, for all the attention they paid to her.

Last of all came Lois, who was sweet and twenty, pretty and demure. Lois — or Miss Lois as she was now called, having attained to the dignity of teacher of the district school, dressed in black a good

deal; and at other times affected soft greys and browns, so that Cousin Winnie had dubbed her "the

Little Quaker Lady."

It was on a Friday afternoon, and the last day of Cousin Winnie's stay at the Round Hill farmhouse, that "Miss Lois," instead of her sister Sallie, came in with Sara after school. She stopped downstairs to say good-bye to the visitor and chat a minute with Mrs. Bradford, who greeted her with something more than the usual neighbourly kindness. Then the two girls went upstairs together, as if they had some private business on hand, as Cousin Winnie remarked.

"Yes," replied Mother, "Sara told me that Lois was coming in to pierce her ears, so that she can wear her new earrings. Lois is an expert at it, and in great demand among the girls."

Elizabeth Bess, who was singing her doll to sleep beside the parlour stove, stopped singing, and her

mouth fell ajar.

Miss Lois was going to "piece" Sara's ears! Well!!

People "pieced" bed quilts, but this was the first time she had ever heard of any one's having their ears "pieced!" She was about to ask Mother what it meant, but, remembering former occasions when her questions had been a cause of mirth to her elders, (or of shame to herself, like the "eavesdropper" incident), she refrained. She would find out for herself, without asking anybody!

Up the stairs she tiptoed, and slipped into Sara's room so quietly that her advent was unnoticed.

Sara was sitting before the bureau, and Miss Lois was bending over her with a threaded needle in her

hand. The "piecing" was about to begin!

But no! Miss Lois laid the needle down on the bureau, and took from her bag a thimble and a cork, which she laid beside it. Then she deliberately pinched Sara's ears, till they were as red as cranberries! The mirror showed her that Sara was smiling, a ghastly sort of little smile; so it must be some kind of a game, that they were playing.

Next she put the thimble on her finger, and placing the cork behind one of the poor, pinched ears, took the needle, and drove it into the flesh, pushing it until it disappeared on the other side, leaving part

of the thread hanging!

And Sara said not a word — cried not a cry!

Elizabeth Bess felt sick — sick, as she watched the operation; but it seemed physically impossible for her either to withdraw her eyes, or get upon her feet to leave the room, or even to protest, since Sara did not. Spellbound, she watched Miss Lois repeat the outrage on the other ear; and through this, too, Sara was silent. When it was over, and the woman turned to put away the tools of her inhuman trade, she stooped, and looking in Sara's face, laughed lightly. Laughed!

lightly. Laughed!

"Did it hurt you much?" she asked. And poor Sara answered, "No, not much." But her lip, where she had bitten it, was white; and the child saw her make a dab at her eyes, with the corner of her apron. Then it was that she threw herself, sobbing, into her

sister's arms.

"Send her home, Sara — send that old school teacher home!"

As it happened, that evening when Cousin Winnie was packing she came across a gift that she had not been able to find before. It was a pair of tiny gold "hoops," which was one of the fashions in earrings in the Sixties. The little box that held them had slipped down into a corner of her trunk, but now, upon finding it, she presented it with a flourish, anticipating her small cousin's delight. The elders were still ignorant of the afternoon's episode.

Lizabeth Bess attracted by their bright prettiness, was delighted with the gift until told what the hoops were for. Then, after a long look into the donor's eyes, she laid the box in her lap, and began slowly backing away across the room. Having reached the haven of Mother's lap, she made a distinct announce-

ment:

"Miss Lois Horton isn't going to make holes in my ears with a needle and thread!" The elders exchanged illuminating glances.

"But, dear, you can't wear them if you don't have

your ears pierced!" Cousin Winnie protested.

"Miss Lois Horton isn't going to piece my ears!

Sara can have the old things if she wants 'em!"

"Elizabeth Bradford!" cried Mother, shocked at this exhibition of ill manners. She put Bess firmly down, and the child seated herself in her little chair, and continued to gaze stolidly before her until presently the lids drooped over her eyes, her head dropped sideways, and she was asleep.

Mother, relenting, half wished the earrings were back in New York. She wished it wholly when, on picking up the sleeper to put her to bed, the little one drowsily voiced her ultimatum:

"Miss Lois — Horton — shan't stick — a — n-e-e-d-l-e —"

"No, sweetheart, she shan't!" Mother whispered into the unconscious ears, and the incident,

temporarily at least, was closed.

Waking up in the middle of the night, as it seemed to her, through the half open bedroom door the child saw Mother and Cousin Winnie still sitting by the fire, confidentially talking. Perhaps it was the sound of her own name that had waked her. Cousin Winnie was saying,

"I'm sorry now, that I didn't bring something else for Bess instead of the earrings. The Little Quaker Lady is evidently in her bad graces, too," and she

laughed softly.

"Yes, and I'm sorry about that too!" Mother spoke up. "Bess is so decided in her likes and dislikes, and Lois is a dear girl. . . . I believe I've never told you, Winnie, but - Lois might have been my daughter, if - if things had turned out differently."

"I have wondered if her quiet colours and her pensiveness might not indicate something of that sort, Aunt Anne. And that locket that she wears, and guards so carefully? Willie and Bess were trying to get her to let them open it the other day, but

she wouldn't. I suppose it has -"

"Yes," Mother nodded, and said no more.

"Has what?" Lizabeth Bess sat up in bed, and almost shouted the question. Almost, but not quite: she was early learning by experience, and again she remembered the "eavesdropper" incident in time!

"Mother," said Sara, "mayn't I take Bess to school to-morrow? Ruby Taylor's been bringing her little sister, and she isn't half as cute as our baby, but everybody made a fuss over her. Do let me, Mother!"

"Why, Sara, she has nothing to wear! I haven't made up her new delaines yet, and she's outgrown

nearly everything she has," Mother objected.

"If you say she can go I'll shorten up that little plaid silk skirt of mine, and there's a little old Garibaldi waist in the bureau drawer that I know will fit her!" urged Sara eagerly. "Just you let me fix

her up, and you'll see!"

So it came to pass on a fine Spring day that Elizabeth Bess, feeling like a princess, went to school for the first time in all the splendour of a gay, plaid silk skirt, white "Garibaldi" waist, black Congress gaiters, striped stockings, and a white leghorn hat, trimmed with pale, pink China asters. Until she was grown up, she never thought of that hat without a thrill. And for a crowning glory — there was a tiny blue parasol with a white handle that sported a shiny, white knob on the end.

Little Sylvia Taylor, about the child's size, was proudly going to school with her big sister, and after some shy and furtive scrutiny of each other, the two tots joined hands, and walked along together.

Sylvia, however, was no novice in the ways of life.

"This your first day at school?" she inquired patronisingly, and her new friend humbly admitted that it was.

"Oh, my! Why, I've been ten million times!" declared Sylvia.

"You'd better look out, if it's your first day," she

added darkly.

"W-why?" faltered Elizabeth Bess. "Why had I better?"

"Oh, because! Lots of things happen the first day that don't never happen again," Sylvia averred with unchildish wisdom.

"I ain't afraid!" the little one bragged, growing bold. "My sister, and my big brover Wee-um won't

let anything touch me!"

Sylvia looked around at the tall girl walking with her own sister; then ahead to where William was walking with some other boys, and for some occult reason she snickered. Then she remarked:

"Well, I guess if a great, big, black bear'd come walkin' in the school house, and eat up the teacher, 'n' all the scholars, I wonder where your sister, an' your 'big brover,' " (this with an exceedingly scornful accent) "would be then!"

Lizabeth Bess waited for Sara and took her hand. "I — I guess I want to go home, Sara," she whis-

pered with trembling lips.

"Why, Bess, what's the matter?" Sara asked in alarm.

The child was silent, whereupon Ruby's sharp eyes

sought Sylvia's. "What have you been saying to Bess, you naughty girl, you?" she demanded. "What did she say to you, Bess? Tell me!"

"She said — she said a big, black bear'd walk in the school, and eat up the teacher, and everybody!"

sobbed Bess.

"O-oh! I didn't say no such a thing! I said, if a big bear'd walk in! And she's an old cry-baby, and a 'fraid-cat!" exploded Sylvia, and declared that she was going home! That she wouldn't walk another step with her! But after a while, peace was made, and the two were walking hand-in-hand again.

Since it was not the epoch-making First Day for Sylvia she was clothed in her everyday garments, including a Shaker bonnet; of which, in the neighbourhood of the china-astered hat, she was a little bit ashamed. Now she furtively slipped it off, and was carrying it behind her, when her companion made a great discovery.

"Oh, you have earrings!" cried the child. "Did they — did they have to stick a needle in your ears?"

"Of course they did!" laughed the sophisticated one. Then — "Haven't you had your ears pierced, yet?" The question seemed to Bess to imply such an unpardonable remissness, that she could not answer. She drew the china-astered hat down over her shamed face and shook her head.

"Did Miss Lois do it?" she asked, emerging at

length.

"Miss Lois Horton? No, indeed! My mother did it."

So! Her mother did it! That was different.

If a mother did it, it couldn't be so very awful. She would think about it!

Somehow, Miss Lois, as teacher, seemed an altogether different person from the Miss Lois who ran in to see Mother every other day. Bess's feelings regarding the "Little Quaker Lady" had been decidedly mixed of late. When she had driven the needle and thread through Sara's ears the little sister felt that she hated her!

But, that very night, Mother had said she was "a dear girl," and Mother's veracity, be it known, was as unimpeachable as the Bible's, or Father's. Then followed that other bewildering statement, that Miss Lois "might have been her daughter." Now, how could it be possible for Mrs. Horton's daughter to be Mother's daughter?

Elizabeth Bess could not fathom these mysteries. One fact she held to staunchly — Mother's infalli-

bility; she could do or say no wrong!

Miss Lois as teacher, was a revelation. She certainly had the kindest eyes, the prettiest light, fluffy hair, the whitest hands. She kissed the new pupil, and said she was glad to see her in school, and then

Elizabeth Bess capitulated.

With the advent of Spring, the school membership had dwindled to the minimum, the older pupils having to help on the farm and in the house, and school matters reached a dead level of monotony. But to little Bess, it was one of the most exciting days of her life.

To be in a real school, sitting at a real desk, and surcharged with the school atmosphere! Several

times she shut her eyes tight, expecting to open them in bed at home, and find that she had been dreaming. Then, in an ecstasy, she would say her A B C's faster than her finger could follow them on the page. But after the noon recess, she laid her head on her little desk, and slept. Whereupon Miss Lois made a bed of coats on the long back seat, and laid her new pupil down on it, where she broke all records by sleeping until school was dismissed at four o'clock.

"Mother," said the child, as the last curl was being tucked inside the little dotted Swiss nightcap that night, "Mother, you may stick a needle into my ears."

"O-oh, child, I couldn't!" and Mother recoiled.

"Well, then, Sara will. Sara, you may -"

"O-o-oh! I couldn't!" cried Sara, clapping her hands over her own little pink hearers. "I never could do it in the world, Bess!"

"Then, how am I ever going to wear my new earrings that Cousin Winnie brought me? I'd like

to know?"

"Oh, do you want to wear them?"

"'Course I want to wear 'em! Sylvie Taylor wears hers!"

"Then you'll have to get Miss Lois to do it; she knows just how, and I don't," said Mother, whereat the prospective subject's countenance fell. And at that moment, who should come in but Miss Lois herself, at which the prospective subject's countenance fell still farther.

"We were just speaking of you!" Sara told her;

"Bess wants me to pierce her ears, but I know I never could do it. I'd stick the needle into a dozen places, instead of two!"

"Too bad!" condoled Miss Lois. "Now she

never can wear the pretty, gold earrings!"

"We thought maybe you would do it, Lois," Mother ventured.

"Oh, no, I never pierce anybody's ears unless they ask me themselves. And besides, you know Bess said I shouldn't. I came in to see if you could lend me a couple of yeast cakes, Mrs. Bradford. It takes such a lot of bread to go the rounds of our family." She sat down in a rocking chair, and took up a book while Mother went to get the yeast cakes. Sara, too, left the room for something, and the Wee One seized the opportunity to ask, "Wouldn't it do if Mother asked you, Miss Lois?"

"No, indeed!"

"Nor Sara, neither?"

"Nor Sara, either. Everybody must ask for her-

self, and must promise not to cry, too."

The little one went back, and sat down in her rocking chair. Mother came in with the yeast cakes, and Lois, saying that she must hurry, was about to go, when a determined little figure in nightgown and cap, blocked her way.

"Please, Miss Lois," she whispered, as the girl bent to her. "Please you do it. And I'll promise

not to cry!"

CHAPTER IV

WHEN THE OLD GONG BLEW

ATHER was going to town, and William and Bess were to "mind the cows" in his absence. Which meant that the cows must be kept on the grass, and off the young rye in the North Lot.

"And you'll have your hands full with them today, Boy," Father told him. "The grass is getting pretty short, and they'll be crazy to get on the rye. By noon they'll have had their fill, and when the Old Gong blows, you can bring them home, and have the afternoon to yourselves."

"And be sure you bring us home some popcorn balls — the pink kind," his little daughter told him.

"And don't forget to stop at the post office," was Mother's direction. "You forgot last time, you know."

"Yes, I'll stop at the post office. And you shall have the popcorn, Bess," he promised, and was gone.

Now one of Bess's favourite occupations was minding the cows — with William, of course. Any work or play in his company was delightful, but this stood out pre-eminent; for she had a playhouse in every field, and made it her headquarters in the intervals of leisure.

But from seven till twelve is a long stretch for a five-year-old, and the child often longed to hear the Old Gong's deep note hours before it was due. This "Old Gong," a powerful factory whistle, was an institution, especially among the farmers, who, for miles around, religiously set their clocks by it. The sun might err — the Old Gong never!

That day, William had a book inside his blouse. It was "The Swiss Family Robinson." Consequently, he had scant word or look for his little sister, after giving her a long switch and her orders:

"You keep them off the lower end of the Rye, Bess, and I'll keep 'em off the rest." That was all; but the child knew her duty, and she did it like a man!

At first her long, lithe whip kept the cows in place; but they were so eager for the tender, young rye that she was kept busy chasing them, and her short legs soon grew tired.

She was to go to the house for their luncheon at half-past nine, and by half-past eight she began asking,

"Wee-um, isn't it most lunchtime? Isn't it lunch-

time yet?" until William lost patience.

"Oh, go on home and get your lunch — and stay there, if you want to!" he told her. "I'll mind the cows myself — might just about as well!" so Elizabeth Bess started slowly homeward, her head drooping, and her old "Shaker" dangling by one string.

Frowning, William looked after her, and as she ducked under the bars at the road, he called, "Oh,

say, Bess!" But she made no sign.

"Oh, well, let her go home if she wants to," he

grumbled to himself. "But I betcher she's crying. Bet a cent she is! And now she won't come back, and I'll have to stay here and starve till noon! Darn it!" said William. But truth to tell, he was thinking more of the dejected little figure with the dangling sunbonnet than of his lost luncheon.

One of the cows was nosing near and nearer the rye, and he made such a furious dash at her that the whole herd took to their heels. Whereupon William again betook himself to the Swiss Family Robin-

son.

These charming castaways had just completed their house in the tree, and were about to ascend the ladder for their first night aloft (William in the lead, so real it seemed), when a voice behind him startled him so that he fell back to earth with a thud.

"Well! I wonder what Fa-ther'd say, if he saw Meg and Cherry eatin' up the rye!" said the voice

scathingly.

William was instantly humble, the more so since his sister bore in one hand a diminutive basket covered with a napkin, and, in the other, a little tin

pail.

On his return, red-faced, from his chase of Meg and Cherry, he found that Elizabeth Bess had adjourned to her "house" under the twin cedars by the stone wall, and had ceremoniously spread out on the napkin two slices of gingerbread, two biscuits and two apples. A minute cup of cocoa flanked each portion. The table was a large flat stone on top of the low wall.

"Why, Lizabeth Bess!" exclaimed William, after a glance at the feast, stopping on his way to it long enough to give his sister a bear hug. "You waited

to eat your lunch with me, didn't you?"

"'Course I did!" She wriggled away frowning; but her downcast eyes were beaming with joy. With the air of a little duchess she poured more cocoa and waited upon William, then nibbled her own portion daintily, little finger extended.

When the repast was finished, William, observing a tendency to droopiness in his small sister's eyelids,

said to her,

"Sleepy, aren't you, Bess? Yes, you are, too. Wait till I spread out my jacket, and you can take a little nap. The cows are not so hungry now, and won't bother much, I guess. I'll call you when it's time," he added, as she smiled up at him sleepily.

"You be sure and call me when the Old Gong

blows, Wee-um?"

"Y-e-s! before that. You'll have to help me to get the cows together." Thus assured, Elizabeth Bess closed her eyes, and went happily to sleep in the shade of the little cedars.

She had slept but a little while — a bare half hour — when an enormous bumble-bee came booming across the field, and, attracted by the remains of molasses cake on the sleeper's countenance, paused for an instant above it, but his buzz-wheel kept on going. So great was the volume of sound assailing her ear-drum at short range, that the child awoke with a bang!

"Wee-um! Wee-um!" she called, running to

meet him. "Turn the cows out, quick! The Old

Gong's blowed!"

"W-h-a-t's the matter with you?" scornfully drawled William. "'Tain't half an hour since we had our lunch. You're out of your head, you are!"
"Oh-h! I ain't, either! The Old Gong has

blowed, Wee-um - I heard it, just this minute!"

"All right! Here comes Chinney down the road - we'll leave it to him. You run and ask him if it's dinner-time. He'll tell you!"

"Oh, Chinney, wait!" called the child as she ran. And Chinney came to the bars, his rosy face wrin-

kling with pleasure at the sight of her.

"I want you to tell me," she panted, "hasn't the Old Gong blowed? Isn't it dinner-time? 'Cause Wee-um he says it isn't!"

The little man cast a knowing squint at the sun, still more than an hour from the meridian. "Land, yes!" he said, drawing a long face. "The Old Gong blowed four hours ago, Wee One!" and he went off chuckling to himself, with a backward glance at a speechlessly indignant William.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" the latter jeered when he found his voice. "You just wait, you miser'ble old bricktop, and see if I don't get

even with you. You just wait!"

And -" 'Twon't be the first time, if you do!" thought Chinney, remembering sundry practical jokes of which he himself had been the victim.

Bess had listened, wide-eyed, scandalised - that a boy - her boy - should address such words to a man, and that man, Chinney - her dear Chinney!

For the second time that day, William turned to her in irritation. "Ah, go on home!" he cried. "You may as well. I'll not have any more peace, now." And also for the second time the child, hurt, turned slowly homeward, her brimming eyes fixed

upon the ground.

Already repentant, William looked after her. "Darn that old redhead!" he said with heat, and ground his teeth together. Casting about for a way to recall his sister without lowering his dignity, he noticed that a young heifer which had been giving trouble all the morning was again encroaching upon the rye. So he called out pleasantly, as if nothing had happened,

"Oh, Lizabeth Bess! Chase that heifer off the

rye, won't you? You're the nearest!"

Delighted to be restored to favour, the junior partner forgot her droop, and, grasping her switch firmly, ran back to turn the heifer. But the animal, instead of running, stood its ground, and, with lowered head and bulging nostrils, watched the advanc-

ing child.

Bess had no more fear of a cow than of a chicken. It was anger at the creature's audacity that caused her to raise her voice in shrill command, thus calling William's attention to the situation. In another second he was bounding down the field, alternately calling to his sister to run! and yelling — shrieking — at the now enraged animal.

So intent was Bess, that she did not heed, even if she understood, William's warning. It was not until she was within a few paces of the heifer, now

bawling sonorously and pawing up the turf, that she stopped, frightened, and turned to run to William.

But she was too late, and William was still too far away. Quick as lightning the cow lurched forward, caught the child on her horns, and tossed her into the air.

Elizabeth Bess gave one scream as the heavens bent to meet her, and another as the earth rose up to catch her. It caught her hard, and everything went out in darkness.

William, with wild sobs and blinding tears, caught up the little unconscious form, and ran, stumbling and staggering, down to the road fence. Here Chinney, who had come hurrying back, met William, and scarcely less heart-broken than he, took his burden from him. A little stream of blood was dribbling from the corner of her mouth, and man and boy were certain that the Wee One was either dead or dying.

"Turn out the cows into the road; I'll carry her," said Chinney. And William, his animosity forgotten, obeyed. Crops must be safeguarded, though

the heavens fall, or the people die!

He caught up with Chinney at the house gate, just

as Father drove up in the other direction.

It was the little grandmother, long considered rather more ornamental than useful, who now rose to the occasion. Coming into the kitchen, she pushed aside the stricken group about Mother's chair and took the Wee One from her arms. Forcing the little jaws apart, she cast a keen glance into the bleeding mouth.

"Get me some camphor and hot water!" said Gran. "She sank these two teeth into her lip when she fell — that's where the blood comes from!"

The little one opened her eyes just as the Old Gong rumbled out its noonday message. It might well have been it that roused her. Slowly she raised herself on Gran's lap, and slowly her eyes roved from one to another, until they fell upon Chinney and fixed him with a reproachful stare.

"Chinney," she said with portentous solemnity,

"Chinney, you told me a story!"

When, after a while, the family could think of other things than the little one's accident, Father said, "By the way, Anne, I have a letter for you. It's done some travelling! It was addressed to Marion, Illinois, and has been to all the other Marions, I guess, from its looks."

Mother took the letter eagerly — she all but snatched it from Father's hand, and tore it open with trembling fingers. She had been waiting for it so

long!

Those watching her, saw her expression gradually change, from eager hope, all the way down the gamut to blank disappointment, not to say despair. Then, without a word, she handed the letter to Father, and left the room. This is what he read:

CHICAGO, January 14, 186-.

Dear Madam:

Yours of the 8th inst. at hand. I have made inquiries regarding the young soldier you mention, who helped to save some people at a fire here last month.

Beyond what the newspapers told of him at the time I can learn but little. He told the reporter, who, by the way, found him quite normal in every way except for his loss of memory, that he had found himself in a hospital in a Pennsylvania town several years ago, with all his past an absolute blank to him. They told him that he had been brought there after the battle of Gettysburg, wounded; that he had been a Northern soldier, as his blue uniform showed, and that was all.

He told the reporter here that he stayed in one place only long enough to earn money with which to travel further, seeking his home or some one who knew him; and shortly after that he disappeared. This, to my regret, is all that I can tell you about him.

CHAPTER V

ELIZABETH BESS GOES CALLING

RS. BARNABY is one, Mrs. Truman two, Mrs. Reade three, Mrs. Burnham four, Mrs.— the others, five, six," counted Mother.

"What others, Mother? What others?" queried her small daughter, who also was going call-

ing.

"Never you mind. Are you all ready?" Mrs. Bradford surveyed her youngest chick with a critical eye. "Why, yes; Sara has decked you out very prettily." Mother threw a bright glance at the big

sister, who felt herself amply repaid.

"Are you going to call on that Mrs. Burnham, Mother?" Sara asked with a little frown. "I wouldn't! Linnie Taft says she always opens the side door when she sees folks coming, so's she won't have to put up the parlour shades and fade the carpet. Anybody as stingy as that!"

"Nonsense!" scoffed Mother. "That's just

spiteful talk."

"Well, anyway, Burr McCauley says there isn't one of the Burnham family but'll squeeze a cent till the Indian hollers!" Sara inelegantly quoted.

"Sara Bradford! To think of a big girl like you

repeating such silly gossip!" Mother was as much irritated by the word "holler," which she detested, as she was by the gossip. "If it were Bess now!—" whereat Bess straightened herself, and felt very virtuous indeed.

But — squeezing a cent till the Indian hollered! — How could an iron Indian holler? She would see about it, though; she guessed she could squeeze as hard as anybody! In her apron pocket was a cent that Father had given her that morning; while Mother was tying her bonnet strings, Bess ran and got the coin. Furtively she squeezed it between little thumb and forefinger, but there was no result. A little harder! But not a sound came from the Indian. Further in the way of compression she dared not go, for if the Indian emitted anything more than the merest squeak she felt that she would be scared all to pieces! . . . Ah, but she knew what she would do!

"Come, dear!" called Mother from the porch, and, slipping the coin into her coat pocket, the investigator came.

A sense of high elation possessed the prospective caller, sitting in state beside her mother in the new "top buggy." This was no ordinary occasion. But once or twice before had the little girl journeyed along the straight, prim village "Street," lined on either side with straight, prim houses over which rows of straight, prim poplars stood sentinel.

The Bradfords, living in the farming district, away from the little settlement, were nearer to the city of Marion; and there they went to church and on business. There they got their mail. There, too, their relatives lived - Aunt Eunice and Uncle Dan'l, and Cousin Marcia Milward. So that it was only on these ceremonial trips that the village part of Green

Hills revealed itself to the little girl.

However, as she progressed, the sense of elation became more and more subdued. The big houses, mostly white with green blinds (as were the two slender-spired churches that faced each other across the Green) and great chimneys rearing themselves above the gables, seemed to be challenging the travellers. The effect of opulence and progress, expressed most strongly by the "silver" door knobs and bell pulls, oppressed Elizabeth Bess. True, Aunt Eunice's door in Marion sported these modernities; but the Bradford door, with its iron knocker and handle, was painfully old-fashioned and plebeian!

Around the corners in the few cross streets shouldered aside, as it were, by their aristocratic white neighbours, occasional old red houses obtruded themselves protestingly. Again, here and there, a sad grey domicile shrank behind its crowding lilacs, now all in lovely bloom. Bess felt sorry for the sad, grey houses, huddled under their drooping roofs like poor old women under faded shawls!

"Here we are, dear!" Mother's voice broke in like music upon these drab communings, as the horse drew up before a big, square house, with hip roof and inside shutters. Next to silver door knobs, inside blinds were the hallmark of gentility! "Who lives here?" Bess whispered, as Mother lifted her down. "This is Mrs. Barnaby's," Mother whispered back. "She's very nice — you'll like her! And Mr. Barnaby is a very clever man — he is writing a book." From the way Mother said it, her little daughter judged that she considered this a great achievement.

"Writing a book, Mother?" she repeated.
"Oh! You mean a writing book." Sara had a writing book wherein, through the medium of dainty script, one was admonished to

"Trust no future, howe'er pleasant — Let the dead past bury its dead!"

"No, no, child! A real book — a story book."

"Mother Bradford!" gurgled Lizabeth Bess, "What are you thinking of? Folks don't write real books — they print 'em!"

"I stand corrected, dear!" laughed Mother.

Mrs. Barnaby, a very pleasant little lady, herself opened the door for her callers. After a few minutes' chat she left the room, returning presently with

a tray on which were cakes and lemonade.

"Both my maids are out," she explained. "Mr. Barnaby has about reached the crisis of his book, and he says the girls disturb him, talking, and running up and down stairs. And even I have to be on my good behaviour! He's so sensitive that I tell him he's a trial to himself and everybody else at such times," confided the lady, with ill-concealed pride.

"One of the penalties of greatness!" laughed Mother. "But to be the wife of a genius should

atone for many things."

"Oh, it does!" agreed the genius's wife, so ingenuously that Bess, attentively regarding Mother,

caught a twinkle in her eye.

"But Mr. Barnaby will want to see little Bess—he is very much interested in children: his next book is to be about them," remarked the lady, with the complacency of the young woman doctor who boasted, "Oh, yes! I know all about babies — I've dissected dozens of them!"

Just before they left the genius was graciously pleased to receive the visitors; and it was with a feeling between amusement and exasperation that Mother noted the palpable appraising of her offspring, and the efforts made to draw her out. The child, however, refused to furnish material for "copy." "Yes, sir," and "No, sir!" was all that the bookmaker could extract from her.

Mrs. Barnaby, who liked little Bess, wanted to make her a present. She told her to go to a bookcase, and take from it any book she chose. Not daring to look a gift horse in the mouth, the little girl extracted a dainty small affair of blue and gold that should, according to the laws of proportion, have held a pretty story. The elders, chatting together, failed to notice further. But when in the privacy of the top buggy the beneficiary examined it, behold! its leaves were blank. There was not a word in or on it except the one word —"Album."

Had Bess's vocabulary been equal to her discernment, "conservative" would be the word she would have used to describe the next hostess, Mrs. Winslow Truman. Indeed, she seemed to embody the atmos-

phere of the neighbourhood, and that was conservative — sometimes abridged to spell "narrow." While they would have indignantly denied the impeachment, the latter-day slogan, "We are the people," fitted the attitude of the average New Eng-

lander of that time to a nicety.

The callers were hardly seated before Mrs. Winslow Truman asked Mrs. Bradford, with concern, if she knew that "a French-Canadian family with a whole raft of children had bought the Jonas Baildon farm?" And when Mother answered that new blood was a good thing for a community, and that the newcomers seemed to be intelligent, respectable people—"But foreigners!" the lady almost snorted.

"You must remember, my dear Mrs. Truman, that you and I — or our forebears — all were for-

eigners once," Mother reminded the irate lady.

"But have you heard them talking their lingo? Why, it sounds exactly like a lot of monkeys chattering together! They had company Sunday — some of the men from the cutlery shop in Marion; and as they passed here jabbering! — really, Mrs. Bradford, they didn't seem to me like human beings!"

"Very possibly our 'lingo' sounds as outlandish to them," Mother defended, the faint colour rising in her cheek at this frank exhibition of intolerance. "Their attempts at English are funny, too; but when I remember how much smarter than I these foreigners are — for they can make themselves understood in my language, while I can't speak theirs at all — I feel properly humbled, instead of proud."

Mrs. Winslow Truman sat silent for half a minute. "I never thought of that," she remarked a bit relentingly; but hardened her heart, and returned to the charge. "Well, I'd like to know what you think of all the Paddies that are coming amongst us? You can't go into Marion any more without meeting them at every turn!"

"You mean the Irish?" asked Mother pointedly. "My opinion is that so long as we didn't object to their joining our armies and helping to win our battles it's rather mean to carp at them now; and that, as in the other case, mainly because of their funny

way of talking."

Then Mother's face began to relax, and the

twinkle crept back into her eye.

"Things are even worse than you think, Mrs. Truman — the enemy is at our very doors!" she said banteringly. "Not only have the French-Canadians invaded Green Hills but an Irish family by the name of McKenna has moved onto the Bowles place. I

understand they've bought it.

"And according to some of the papers, it's only a question of time before the Negroes will be swarming into the State, filling our schools and our churches, and our places in business as soon as they're competent to fill them. Oh, there are great changes coming," quoth Mother, wiser than she knew, "and we must be prepared to make the best of them!"

She rose to go, and her hostess rose also, a gleam of indignant apprehension in her eyes. "I've nothing to say about the schools," remarked Mrs. Wins-

low Truman, who was childless; "but the Blacks will never crowd me out of my church — I promise you that!" She voiced the sentiment of some of the most radical abolitionists: "Free the Negro, but don't free him around me!"

Once outside the house, Mother drew a long, deep breath. "Thank goodness, Bess, whatever else your mother is, she is not narrow!" she said with em-

phasis.

Elizabeth Bess surveyed her parent critically, and somewhat sceptically. "But you are a little narrow, Mother," she told her gently. "You're narrower'n Mrs. Cone is." Mrs. Cone was the Bradfords' stout next door neighbour —"The lady of the Flowers," Mother called her, because she was so fond of them.

Mother snuggled her small daughter up to her on the buggy seat. "I'll have to broaden out then, dear," was all she said.

There was no one at home at the Reade house, and Bess was glad. Calling is pretty tiresome work—especially when your hostess pays no more attention

to you than if you were a graven image!

At the Burnhams' a "parcel" of children were playing in the yard, and the Wee One, after having been ushered in at the front door, begged to be allowed to play with them. They were singing lustily, to the tune of "Tramp, tramp, tramp," a chorus that ran—

[&]quot;Fare you well, my Mary Ann, you must do the best you can,
For I'll never jump the bounty any more!"

The grim significance of the words — of which the singers were happily unconscious — turned Mother a little sick. Memory carried her back to a day now three or four years past, when one of her neighbours, not a "bounty jumper," but a deserter, paid within her very sight the price of his folly. Plainly, as if it were yesterday, she could see two uniformed soldiers coming up the road and climbing the fence into the field where Jonathan Titus was planting corn. Titus was a conscript, who had left his wife and little boys to run the farm in his absence; but the call of the land in the springtime, and the thought of the wife and children struggling with the work had proven too much for him, so he stole home to help with the planting.

Next before Mother's eyes appeared Titus's wife, running toward him, and screaming. Looking up, Titus saw the approaching soldiers, and he himself started to run. The men called to him to halt, but he kept on running wildly. Not far, however: two shots rang out, and Titus pitched into the furrow and lay still, while the "detail" put their pistols back in

the holsters and walked away.

"Please let me go play with the child'en, Mother!" teased the child again; and Mother woke up, and breathed a prayer of thankfulness that the war—the "cruel war" indeed—was over, even

though its wounds remained open and sore!

Mother was saying good-bye at the door, before Lizabeth Bess thought of the cent in her pocket. Jerking it out, she pressed it into the hand of a little Burnham about her own size. "Squeeze it!" she

commanded, "squeeze it hard!" The youngster squeezed until his eyes popped, Bess hopping from one foot to the other in the excitement of waiting for the Indian's protest. But Lo never peeped.

"Come, dear," Mother called. And -"Give me my cent!" said Bess, holding out her hand for it.
"No! You gave it to me!" the boy protested,

putting his hand behind him.

"O-o-h! I did not! I just lended it to you, to see you make the Indian holler!" cried Bess indignantly.

Mother caught the words, and turned in a panic to see if the other mother had heard. Fortunately,

the door had just closed upon her!

"Elizabeth Bradford!" cried Mother; "come here this moment!" Sniffing and scuffing, and very red in the face, Bess obeyed. She wilted completely under Mother's sternly disapproving gaze, and huddled down in her corner of the seat as old Charlie, headed homeward, stepped out like a two-year-old. Of course Mother relented, not being made of stone!

It was late when they reached home, Mother having gone out of her way to call on the nervous little Frenchwoman, who melted into hysterical tears at this evidence of the lifting of the social ban which the

"Yankees" had placed upon her.

And again did Mother go out of her way to knock at the door of one of the sad, grey houses, where Mrs. McKenna, large and placid and clear-eyed, welcomed her as woman to woman, without a hint of obsequiousness. A group of little children, wholesomely clean, and one a regular beauty, hovered shyly about their mother; while Elizabeth Bess forgot everything else in the world when the fat baby, the first of the genus she had known, held out its hands for her to take it!

"Well, Bess, did you have a good time to-day?" Father asked, as the family sat down to the supper table.

"I would've had, only for that bad Burnham boy," she complained alliteratively.

"Why, what did he do?" asked everybody.

"He took my cent, and wouldn't give it back! He said I gave it to him, but I didn't. I just lended it to him, so's he could squeeze the Indian. Didn't do any good, though - the Indian never hollered once!"

Then it was that Father did what the Indian re-

fused to do, the "child'n" following suit.

"What's the matter?" asked Lizabeth Bess, a bit peevishly. "I think it's just a story! I don't believe any one could make a iron Indian holler by pinching him!"

"Right you are, little one," laughed Father. " If

a Burnham couldn't do it, it can't be done!"

"But he 'pinched' it all right!" cried William,

and went off again.

His small sister eyed him coldly. When he had subsided, she resumed: "And that man that they said was writing a book! Why, he wasn't even writing in a book! He was just scribbling on some old sheets of paper. I saw him!"

CHAPTER VI

"THE BEST-LAID PLANS!"

"ED at night, is the sailor's delight!" quoted Mother, watching the sunset. "I do hope it will be bright and pleasant to-morrow!" And something in the way she said it made the children chorus eagerly, "Why, Mother?"

"Oh, we've been having so much rain lately, for

one thing."

"Yes, but what's the other thing?" Sara demanded. "You might as well tell us — you know

we always find out!"

"You wouldn't find this out until after it happened," Mother answered her big girl. "But I don't know that there's any use in making a secret of it. If it's pleasant, I'm going to take Bess to town,

and have her picture taken — that's all."

All, indeed! If Mother had said she intended to take the child and start for Europe in the morning, it would hardly have created more excitement. There followed a whirlwind of suggestion as to what the subject should wear, whether she looked "cunningest" sitting or standing, looking up or looking down, grave or smiling.

"Now, aren't you glad you've had your ears

pierced, so that you can wear your pretty earrings?" Sara asked. Bess's answer was an equivocal but forbidding frown. While the fact of the piercing was a distinct triumph for the conventions, it had left

painful recollections behind.

Never dawned a fairer morning than that eventful Wednesday. Elizabeth Bess, awake at the earliest peep o' day, was finally arrayed in her new black-and-white checked silk, with its low neck and little puff sleeves. Her gold locket and chain were flanked by the ear "hoops," and the carnelian ring was in place upon her finger. The day of pantalettes was happily past, but a dainty lace edging was carelessly (?) allowed to show beneath the short skirt, above the little strap slippers and white stockings. The china aster hat and blue parasol lay upon the bed awaiting their exploitation, and Elizabeth Bess Bradford was the happiest child in the town.

"But her hair, Mother! You didn't get a bit nice curl on it!" Sara complained, twisting a lock around her finger. "We want to send a picture to Uncle Jim, down in Virginia, and I'd like her to look

her prettiest."

"Never mind; I'm going to take her to the hair-

dresser, and have him curl it."

"Mother! It'll cost you fifty cents!" Sara warned her parent.

"I don't care if it costs a dollar!" Mother an-

swered recklessly.

When the next door neighbour, Mrs. Cone, the owner of the gate not made of pickets, saw the child in all the glory of the aster hat and blue silk parasol,

she came down the path of the wonderful flower garden, and stopped the wayfarers. "Why are we so gay, to-day?" she called.

"Bess is going to have her picture taken," said Mother. "And we're going to send one down to

Uncle Jim, in Faginia!" smiled the little one.

"Indeed! Just wait till I get my shears!" She hurried into the house, old fat Jack, the dog, waddling after her, alert and curious. The delighted Bess knew what was coming, or thought she did; but the magnificence of the "nosegay" that Mrs. Cone placed in her hands a few minutes later, all but took her breath. Peonies, white and pink, interspersed with long, drooping sprays of Bleeding Heart, formed the center, around which were massed scores of little May pinks and Sweet Williams.

On the wall of Bess's bedroom hung a picture of a lady and a little girl splendidly attired, the child's satin skirt standing out like a circus-rider's. The mother's taper fingers held open an ornate iron gate (a garden stood revealed beyond), and the girl carried a great bunch of flowers. Bess's skirt did not stand out like a circus-rider's: her hoop was a modest affair, but her fancy pictured her at that moment a perfect replica of the little girl by the gate, who was her ideal. It was one of the Great Moments of Life!

As they started on again, the child smiling back at Mrs. Cone, Mother noticed a little cloud sailing up the eastern sky. Another and another followed, overtaking the sun, until in a little while the intervals of sunshine were briefer than those of shadow.

"Make him go faster, William!" urged Mother. As William applied the whip, a clatter of wheels and hoofs behind helped to persuade Charlie (who did not like to be passed) to accelerate his speed. His spurt was in vain, however; one of the Bradfords' neighbours — Jerry Cowles — galloped his horse past them, almost crowding them into the ditch, and without giving the least intimation that he knew who they were.

"Miserable old fire-eater!" said Mother, as William got the wagon back into the track. "I believe

he'd like to upset us!"

"What's the matter with him, anyway?" asked William angrily. "What did we ever do to him,

that he always acts so mean?"

"Nothing whatever, except that your father advocated peace, just as Abraham Lincoln advocated it—until peace was out of the question. Your father was a traitor in his eyes, even after giving his son for the Union!" Mother spoke with unusual warmth.

"And did he - did Jerry Cowles go to the war?"

asked William eagerly.

"Not he!" answered Mother. "When they drafted him, he hired a substitute — young Hiram Foster."

"Did he come back?" asked both children at once.

"No, he never came back. He was killed on the march with Sherman."

"Well, I'm glad I'm not in that old codger's

shoes," said William.

"I don't envy him myself," said Mother. "I believe the sun is going to stay out this time — the clouds are scattering!" she remarked hopefully, as they entered the town. "You go to the black-smith's, William, and meet us at the gallery when the horse is shod. I guess we'll be ready by that time."

The waiting-room at the little hairdressing "parlour" was newly fitted up, with silken hangings shading the opaque, ground glass windows, which, by the way, might have been made of tin, so far as seeing through them went. Mother could not have told whether the room grew darker while she waited, or whether she imagined it, but when at length Elizabeth Bess — looking as pretty as a picture — was lifted down from the high chair, she hurried her out into the street, only to find that the sun had retired definitely, and that a chilly mist was falling.

In desperation, hoping against hope, they sped down the street to the gallery. Just as they reached it, the Old Gong blew for noon, and the photographer came out, locking the door behind him. He answered their questioning glances with a shake of his head — a pitying shake, as he noted the little one's

finery, and the brave but futile floral display.

"Can't take pictures on a rainy day, Madam," he said blandly. "Come soon again, when the weather

is bright and fair."

It was a sadly disappointed pair that awaited William's coming under the dripping awning. Mother told the children it would be better to buy an umbrella than get soaking wet, so she left them standing there while she went into a neighbouring store. The main street of the newly-made city ran parallel with the newly-built railroad, upon which the rear windows

of the stores looked out. A train was pulling out from the station nearby, and Mother stepped to the

window to see it pass.

As she looked down (the tracks were some eight or ten feet below the street level in front) she staggered back with a little cry that brought the clerks running to her with anxious enquiries. One, glancing out, had a glimpse of a tall young man standing on a car platform and looking uncertainly about, as if searching for something. Then the train curved around a corner, and he was gone.

Mother told Father about it upon reaching home, but he refused to listen to any such "foolish notion" as that the young man on the train was his missing son. Vainly she cited the case of the soldier in Chicago who was searching the country for "some one who knew him," and insisted upon the traveller's resemblance to Howell and the additional fact of the town's phenomenal growth and the advent of the rail-

road, since he went away.

"You're letting your imagination run away with you, Anne," Father declared, "and you've got to stop it right here! It doesn't do to believe everything that's told you — that fellow in Chicago probably had some good reason for being nameless: you remember that he disappeared very shortly, when people began to question him. No, Anne; if our boy was alive he would have come back to us. As for this loss of memory business, I never heard of such a thing before, and I don't take any stock in it at all. We must find our happiness in the children that are left to us — and be thankful for them. And some

day, you know—" he added gently, but when Mother put her folded arms on the table, and hid her convulsed face upon them, he patted her shaking shoulders, and said no more.

CHAPTER VII

EXILED!

ALAMITY threatened the Round Hill Farm house: Sara had been stricken with diphthe-

ria, and was very ill.

In the Sixties, there was nothing like the strict quarantine of later days in the case of contagious disease. "Keep the other children away from her," the doctor said, and that was all. But with Bess this was easier said than done, so banishment was the only alternative.

Father telegraphed to some old family friends living five or six miles away, and promptly the next day "Grandma" Bayley made her appearance in an old-fashioned basket phaeton, drawn by a hollow-backed, old white horse. As Lizabeth Bess, bursting in upon her startled family, graphically described it,

"Here comes a old lady a-riding in a clothes basket!"

But when told that she was to go home with the old lady—" on a visit"—the child balked. Not all the resources of the Bayley place, glowingly set forth, availed to move her. It was not until the reluctant William (at Mother's instigation) laughed at her for a baby, that she succumbed.

"Elizabeth Bess, poor little thing— Tied to her mammy's apron string!"

jeered William, and set his teeth hard on a "DARN!" when his sister, in a storm of angry tears, declared that she would go away, and not come

back to play with him no more, never!

Later, she relented; and when William carried her out to the "clothes basket" chariot, she squeezed him so tight as almost to "cut off his wind," as he told her. And when she had gone, on pretence of examining his woodchuck trap, William cut 'crosslots to a point where he could see the exile once more. At his whistle, she stood up in the phaeton, and watched and waved at him until an intervening hill—not to mention blinding tears—hid him from her view.

In the hurry of getting off, or maybe for sanitary reasons, Elizabeth Bess did not take a single toy with her, so, had it not been for a long-forgotten treasure chest that Grandma Bayley unearthed in the garret, things would have gone hard with her. In this box were lovely bits of silks and velvets, jewel-like glass buttons, worsted flowers smelling of camphor — and, greatest find of all, an ugly, old wooden doll with a painted face. With a delighted cry, the child pressed the monstrosity to her hungry heart, and the day was saved.

Still —

It was the afternoon of the fifth day, and Bess was sitting on the front stoop, making a dress for old Belinda. Grandma Bayley, who was kindness itself,

had given her her choice of the pretty pieces, but it was almost impossible to make a selection. There were a dozen pretty ones that she wanted, but was too shy to ask for. But it was pleasant to "make out" that they were hers — that she was going to take them home, and make them into dresses for Susie and Rose, the inherited dolls. She had gone so far with her pretending as to tie all but two up in a little bundle, which she hid away in an old carpet bag that hung from a low rafter.

Needle and garment had dropped from the Wee One's hands, and she sat straining her eyes down the road, along which Father might be coming. In fancy she could see the old Panama hat and linen duster, more beautiful than an emperor's ermine; and the scent of the tobacco smoke in his whiskers! Ah, the

groves of Araby wafted no such perfume!

All at once, down the road by the corner of the woods, the watcher saw a strange thing coming. It looked like a little yellow house on wheels with a man sitting on top for a chimney! Now the child's reason told her that little houses with men for chimneys did not go travelling along the roads, and yet — and yet, she seemed to remember having seen that same outfit before.

"O-o-o-h! It's Johnny Mahone, the tin pedlar!" she cried, jumping up and down. "Gra'ma Bayley! Gra'ma Bayley — here comes Johnny Mahone!"

The advent of a tin pedlar may seem a small thing to the modern young person, who can walk into a Ten Cent Store, and for a dime purchase anything from a doll to a jewelled ring! But there were no Ten Cent Stores when Elizabeth Bess was young. Consequently, when the tin pedlar called at your house, opened up the door of his caravan and let the light shine in upon its tinny splendours, not to speak of the glassware and crockery, and little brooms with beautiful, marbled handles, and little red dustpans, and A B C plates!—

Nervous chills were creeping up and down the child's spine, as the tin wagon drew near. Would Johnny Mahone know her, here so far away from home? He was blind in one eye, as well as lame in one leg, since "the war." If he should take her for a stranger and an alien, one to whom shining A B C plates were sold, but never given — could she wonder at it? But could she bear it? — That was the question!

Johnny Mahone was staring with all the power of his single eye as he drew near; another half minute

would settle it!

"Hel-lo!" he shouted. "Mrs. Bradford's little girl, as I'm a sinner!" Climbing painfully down from his high seat, "What are you doing here, sissy?" he asked, taking her little round chin in his hand.

Elizabeth Bess was so stirred that she could not answer. Her brown head drooped over the old doll, and a couple of tears splashed upon its painted face. So Johnny Mahone, scenting tragedy and respecting it, did not press the question. Instead, he threw open the door of the little "house" with a flourish, and reaching in, brought forth an A B C plate — a

little tin tray with the complete alphabet stamped

around its edge.

"The very last one — I was saving it for you!"
He gave it as one presenting the keys of the city on a silver salver, and she received it in the same ex-

alted spirit.

The tin pedlar, an old neighbour of the Bradfords' known and liked by everybody in that section, put up his horse, and prepared to spend the night at the Bayleys'. A chilly wind had come up at sundown, and a wood fire in the big kitchen stove made the room very pleasant as, supper over, Grandsir Bayley and Johnny Mahone settled themselves to talk. The pedlar not only brought the cumulative news of the neighbourhood, but he also read the papers and kept up with the times. Moreover, he had an Irishman's wit, and so made very acceptable company. He was always welcome at the Bradfords', so now Bess was puzzled to see Grandma, the placid, begin fidgeting around, and casting anxious glances at the two men.

Johnny opened the ball by stretching his stiff leg

out to the fire and rubbing it vigorously.

"Gosh! I wish that blame Johnny-reb had this bullet in his knee — it aches like all possessed tonight," said he.

"Why not wish a little fu'ther — wish ye hadn't

gone to war?" Grandsir enquired tauntingly.

"'Cause it didn't enter my head," answered Johnny promptly. "I'd give the whole leg to Uncle Sam, if 'twas necessary!"

"The more fool you!" said the old man, in a

way that made the small Elizabeth Bess want to throw something at him. "To resk your life for a passel o' niggers that the hull kit and caboodle of ain't wuth—"

"Now, Silas, for pity's sake!" implored Grand-

ma; but the old man had mounted his hobby.

"Don't ye 'Now, Silas 'me," he went on spunkily; "no man kin tell me that wholesale murder is any holier than retail murder. And Abraham Lincoln—"

"Stop right where you are, Mr. Bayley!" bristled the pedlar. "No man, old or young, can say any-

thing against Abe Lincoln to me!"

"I do' know as I want to say anything ag'in him; I s'pose he done what he thought was right. But so did Jeff Davis do what he thought was right."

"I s'pose war wasn't murder when he made it!"

sneered Johnny.

"The South was fightin' for their homes!" the old man asserted. "Jeff Davis was as honest a man as Abe Lincoln was! Yet those little tykes that spend all their wakin' hours 'round my cider mill, 'll 'Hang Jeff Davis on a Sour Apple-tree' from mornin' till night. They'll tramp the apples into pummice, an' hang Jeff Davis higher'n Haman while they're a-doin' of it. And their parents'll let 'em. I tell ye, it shouldn't be allowed! Jeff Davis done what he thought was right!"

"Well, Abe Lincoln did what he knew was right." The one time Irish schoolmaster and Fenian, to

whom liberty was more than life, spoke quietly.

"There was your great abolitionist, Horace Gree-

ley, went bail for Jeff Davis. That showed what he

thought of him!" triumphed the old man.

Johnny Mahone was about to give his explanation of the incident, when he caught sight of the old lady's worried countenance, and stopped. Drawing a newspaper from his pocket, "Here's something of more interest to you farmers than a war that's over and done with," he remarked, and began reading about a newly organised Grange, one of the first to be instituted in the country.

This Grange movement, then in its infancy, was destined to become one of the greatest factors in the promotion of social and business activities in the life

of the American farmer.

But to the little one, "Grange" was a dry subject, following the stirring ones of Lincoln and Davis. She fell asleep in the midst of it, and Grandma Bay-

ley carried her off to bed.

In the morning, the old lady brought out a big bag of rags, just as Mother always did; and the pedlar weighed them on his great steelyards. Long and seriously did she ponder the question of what to take in exchange. Half a dozen milk pans came first, then an earthen pie-dish. She wavered visibly between some fluted tumblers and a new broom; but in the end, New England economy conquered — the tumblers were relinquished.

As Johnny Mahone transferred the rags to his own bag, a bright patch of colour caught the Wee

One's watchful eye, and also the pedlar's.

"Them's a couple of old carpet bags that's been hanging in the garret, and catching the dust," the old lady explained. "They're not rags, exactly, but you'll get more than rag price for them, I know."

"That's all right, Ma'am!" Johnny replied, as, swinging the bag to the top of the wagon, he pre-

pared to start.

At that moment, a fearful thought struck Bess. Dropping Belinda, she flew into the house, and up to the garret, where her worst fears were realised: her carpet bag, with its precious contents, was gone!

Down the two flights of stairs she came at breakneck speed, and without stopping to answer Grandma's questions, rushed out of the gate and down the road, a little whirlwind of heels and skirts, in the

wake of the receding tin wagon.

The pedlar, who was merrily whistling, "Oh, Willie, We Have Missed You!" paused to light his pipe; which was fortunate, else his pursuer would have followed until she fell exhausted. As it was, hearing a shrill hail—"Wait, Johnny Mahone!" and again, sobbingly, "O-h, wa-it, Johnny Mahone!" he turned his wagon around, and drove back to meet the child.

Grandma Bayley, standing at the gate, keeping watch of the fugitive lest she vanish, and calling wildly for "Silas!" now saw the pedlar dismount, pull one of the bags off the wagon top, shake out the rags, and scatter them with his foot. She was still wondering whether the man had suddenly lost his mind when, just as Grandsir came running up from the orchard, Johnny Mahone refilled the bag and replaced it; swung the little one up on the high seat, and started back with her. And the old lady took her

hand from her throbbing heart, and breathed

again.

"Here she is, Ma'am, right side up with care!" Johnny grinned, as having handed Lizabeth Bess down, he again turned his steed, and resumed his rendition of "Willie, We Have Missed You!"

Grandma Bayley made a very lenient confessor, when the little girl told the story of the recovered

parcel.

"Good land! child, I meant you to have them!" said the old lady, stroking some of the pieces with reminiscent fingers, and giving a brief history of this one and that.

"Here's a awful pretty one, Gra'ma Bayley!" said Bess, drawing out a bit of white silk ribbon with blue and red lettering on it, and a little, flag-shaped pin rusted in the hem at the top. "What does it say on it? There's a U, and an S, and a —"

"Where did you get that, child?" asked Grandma, taking it from her with fingers that trembled. "I lost it a long time ago, and never could find it!

Where did you get it?"

"Why, it was in with the other pieces. What is

it, anyway?"

"It — it was my dear boy's. All his company wore them; he took it off his breast and gave it to me, the day he went to Mexico," faltered Grandma Bayley.

"I didn't know you had a boy," said Bess gravely.

"What did he go to Mex - Mexygo for?"

"To fight for his country," answered the old lady proudly. "He went away to the war."

"Oh, did he?" cried the child, electrified.

"Why, my Howell went away to the war, too!"

"But this was another war. It's twenty years and more since he left me. Let me keep that, and you can have all the other pieces."

The little girl was doing some rapid counting on her fingers. "My! That's a long time," said she.

"When did he come back?"

"He didn't come back." The old lady put her hand up to her face, to hide its quivering. But Bess's eyes were sharp.

"Not at all? Didn't he come back at all, Gra'ma

Bayley?"

"No; he was reported among the missing after the fall of Mexico City, and we never heard from

him again."

"Oh, missing!" repeated the child, greatly relieved. "He'll come back, then, if he's only missing. That's what Howell is, and he's coming back. But seems to me, Gra'ma Bayley, it's time your boy was coming - twenty years! Mother says Howell's been gone 'bout four."

Grandma Bayley's eyes had long been strangers to tears; but Bess, with a child's unconscious heartlessness, had sunk the probe deep. The old lady fumbled for her handkerchief, and put it to her eyes.

"My boy is dead - he'll never come back," she

said brokenly.

"But Gra'ma Bayley! When he's only miss-

ing!" the tormentor persisted.

"It's all the same - all the same!" said Grandma Bayley, rocking slowly back and forth.

Elizabeth Bess stood transfixed. She put her little hand over her heart, where something seemed to hurt. Was it "all the same"? Well, it might be for Grandma Bayley's boy, but not for Howell Bradford: he was coming back!

CHAPTER VIII

GRANDSIR GIVES HIS WORD

beth Bess home on the second Sunday of her exile, but in a letter received the day before by the old folks, he stated that, one horse having gone lame, and the other being worked out, it would be impossible for him to come for a few days longer.

Of course the little one was terribly disappointed. She hid her grief as well as might be, but the pitying Bayleys talked it over together, and Grandsir proposed that they take her home on the morrow.

"We haven't been down to William's in a coon's age—'twould do us both good to go. What say ye?" he asked, as his wife kept silent. "Any objections?"

"Yes, Silas, I have objections," the lady replied

mysteriously.

"Out with 'em, then, 'ithout any hemmin' or hawin'!"

"Well, there's just this about it, Silas — you're so hot-headed and so outspoken, and get yourself all het up so about politics and the war and things, that I don't take a mite of comfort in going out with you any more. There, now — it's out!"

"I sh'd say it was," replied her spouse drily.

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"You know it's so, Silas! Why, the other night, I was afraid you and Johnny Mahone'd come to blows!"

"Shucks!" was Grandsir's disgusted comment.

"It's the honest truth! — I'd rather stay to home than go; unless you'll promise me that you won't get into an argument and that you won't talk politics!"

"All right!" snapped Grandsir, taking up the

milk pails. "You can stay to hum then!"

The old man was very angry at this attempted curtailment of his rights as an American citizen, and free speech was the first of these! It was bad enough during the war. One well-remembered day stood out vividly before him: It was at the railway station in Marion, when, after the draft excitement, the soldiers were being sent to the front; and "the old rebel," as he was called by his neighbours, voiced his opinions so forciby, that some one in the crowd called for "a rope!" The old rebel was no coward, however. Taking a dollar from his pocket, he held it up before the crowd, daring any man of them to take it and buy the rope with which to hang him. The sheer audacity of the thing appealed to the Yankee sense of humour; and, as luck would have it, Mr. Bradford happened along just then, and persuaded his old friend to go home with him.

The streams of milk beat foaming into the tin pail under Grandsir's sinewy hands. . . . To be dictated to by a female! And yet — Mandy was a good woman, according to her lights. And she did enjoy visitin' now and then and he didn't like to

make her uncomfortable!

By the time the milking was done Mandy's husband had done what was for him a remarkable thing — he had changed his mind. Just for this once, to please her, he would agree to bridle his tongue!

Elizabeth Bess did not want to go to Heaven: it was Heaven enough to be at home again, sitting in Father's lap after dinner, and smiling sleepily at Sara, who was lying on the lounge. Tired after her long journey, she was about to succumb, when the plebeian knocker sent a challenge through the house; and who should come tripping in but little Mrs. Barnaby, followed by the writer of books, who, his feat accomplished, was relaxing, taking time for the amenities of life — and incidentally, perhaps, searching for "local colour."

After a little, the women drew together around Sara's couch, and the men did likewise at the other end of the long room. Naturally, politics afforded the men an absorbing topic. President Johnson had been impeached and acquitted, and the pros and cons of his case were discussed with warmth by the two younger men. Grandsir took no part in the discussion, to the astonishment of Father, who knew his proclivities so well. One point after another was referred to him, only to be answered equivocally. Meanwhile the old man fussed and fidgeted, crossed and uncrossed his legs, rubbed his hands and "cracked" his knuckles, and ran his fingers through his abundant grey hair. He even had nothing to say about the coming presidential nominations; and when asked what he thought about Grant as a possible candidate, Grandsir "guessed he was all right."

Then it was that Father was sure his old friend was either ill or threatened with dementia, for Grant

was his bête noir, as McClellan was his hero.

"Aren't you feeling well, Mr. Bayley?" Father asked. "You don't seem like yourself to-day." Grandma, catching the words, cast an anxious glance at her spouse, who glared back at her as he twisted his tuft of chin whisker into a rope.

"Yes, I'm well as usual - well as usual!" he an-

swered.

As was inevitable, with war so recent, some phases of it were gone into by the two men — among other things, Jeff Davis's "perfidy," and his pardon later

by the Government.

"If I'd had the handling of his case, the rascal would never have gone free!" exclaimed Barnaby. Turning to Grandsir, who was a stranger to him—"What is your opinion, sir? Don't you think Jeff Davis should have been hanged?" he asked. And the old man, his whole being intent upon breaking away from this torture, answered vacuously, "I do' know—I do' know!"

Lizabeth Bess, still sitting in Father's lap, and listening eagerly to the discussion, now straightened up

and faced the unfortunate old man.

"Why, Grandsir Bayley, you do know!" she said earnestly. "Don't you 'member how mad you was the other day 'cause the child'n sung 'Hang Jeff Davis on a Sour Apple Tree'? You said it ought to be stopped. And singing about it isn't as bad as hanging him!"

As the child finished, every eye was fixed on Grandsir, who looked as if he might have a stroke of apo-

plexy any moment.

"Why, er — I guess, mebbe —" he was floundering, when his wife mercifully came to the rescue. "Silas," said she, "I free you from your promise not to talk politics to-day; I didn't know it'd be so hard. I'm obliged to ye for giving it, but after this, you can be your own man!"

"Sensation" is the only word that describes the brief pause before the elders raised a shout of laughter, in which Grandsir himself sheepishly joined. Leaning forward, and shaking a finger at the

child:

"Ye little coot, ye! I was jest agoin' to write ye down in my black book!" he told her. "But now, I guess we'll call it square!"

"Call what square?" queried the puzzled youngster. "I don't know what you're talkin' about,

Grandsir Bayley!"

Mr. and Mrs. Cheney came in to welcome the exile, after the early supper. Chinney had settled himself in his recognised "story-telling" pose, when Father reminded William that the corn fodder had not been cut for the cows in the morning. "I remember the time," Chinney had begun, when —"Don't, Chinney — don't remember it till we get back with the corn fodder!" Bess begged, and Chinney obeyed.

To celebrate his small sister's return William had built a new jinricksha. Every few weeks — or months, according to the condition of his finances —

William would procure a pair of old wheels from the blacksmith shop, purchased for "a song." These would be fitted to an old axle, a drygoods box placed atop, and a pair of hickory shafts attached to complete the vehicle. The life of a 'ricksha was necessarily brief, so Bess was delighted to find a new

one awaiting her.

Into the 'ricksha the child climbed. Between the shafts William took his place; and off up the road they went, Nero running ahead and getting cross-eyed in the attempt to keep the goal and the cart constantly in sight. No previous 'ricksha had ever attained such speed, and the passenger kept her mouth shut tight, not to bite off the tip of her tongue when they jumped the "thank-ye-ma'ams."

It was William's province to cut the fodder, which his sister piled into the cart. She was proudly "keeping up with" William when the sickle suddenly cut too wide a swath. With a scream Bess tumbled in a little heap, and her brother saw her hair all wet with

blood.

Terrified at the sight, William forced his trembling arms to lift her into the cart; and the little cavalcade started for home in sad contrast to the joyous party that had left it a little while before.

"Don't cry so, Bess — don't cry so!" he kept begging; but the little one thought it was the last of

her, and she wasn't going to die unheard!

Mother met them outside the gate, and hurried the victim into the lamplight, which showed the chestnut curls all matted and gory.

"Oh, I didn't know she was so near — and the

sickle hit her on the head!" mourned William, when

they questioned him.

Lizabeth Bess, who loved to be fussed over and sympathised with, was revelling in attentions when she heard Father say, "Come with me, sir, I'll teach you to be more careful!" She knew that their destination was the wood-shed. Pushing aside Mother and the basin, she sat upright in Gran's lap. "No!" she screamed. "You shan't teach him, Father — you shan't! I won't have him teached!"

"Let me look at that cut," said Chinney. He lifted the matted hair, and gently separated the lips of the wound with thumb and finger. "Why, ma'am, it's nothing!" he assured Mother. "A dig in the scalp always bleeds like a stuck pig. This is

barely more than skin deep!"

"Here, boy — empty this basin, and bring some clean water." When William had gone out, Chin-

ney turned to Father:

"Let the boy alone, man!" said he. "He'd give his right hand for that baby, and he feels bad enough now. Let him alone!"

It was very disconcerting to be told that her accident was "nothing!" But the service to William outweighed the slight to herself. Bess had long felt that Chinney did not like William, but that belief was now dispelled: Chinney had shown himself a man and brother!

CHAPTER IX

CONFIDENCES

HE winter term of school was over, and the "Little Quaker Lady" was enjoying her freedom — if freedom it could be called, being simply a change of occupations. One lovely afternoon in the late Spring she was sitting at her window, finishing a dress for Sally, when to her surprise, she saw little Bess Bradford running up the road as fast as her short legs could carry her.

Not that there was anything surprising in a visit from that young lady, for, since the advent of pleasant weather, Bess Bradford and little Bertha Horton had spent a good deal of their time together, sometimes at one house, sometimes at the other. What surprised Lois was the fact that it was about sundown, and that the two little girls had said goodbye for the day, and parted, but a brief half hour before. And here was Bess coming "as if she'd been sent for"; moreover, it was evident that she had been crying, and that the tears were still very near.

Thinking that something must be wrong at home, and that she had come with a message, Lois was about to hail her; but Bess shortened sail, so to speak, on entering the yard, and began looking

around as if searching for something. She went into the little old summer house, where she and Bertha had lately played, and moved all the dolls' furniture and looked under it, and under the seats and table. The grape arbour, and the well-house were next searched, but to no avail, as evidenced by the lifting of a corner of a new blue gingham apron to Bess's brimming eyes. As her pupils would have told you, "Miss Lois" was tender-hearted, and so she waited for no more, but called down to know what was the matter.

The child lifted a teary face to the window. "C-can I c-come up and tell you, Miss Lois?" she faltered.

"Of course you can, dearie! Come in the front

door, and right upstairs."

Lois Horton had a very warm spot in her heart for Howell Bradford's little sister. She would have liked to take her up in her arms and kiss her, and wipe away her tears, but did not dare. She felt, in spite of the partial reconciliation that had preceded the last ear "piecing," and the skilfulness with which that trying operation was performed, that Bess somehow did not approve of her.

"I came back again, Miss Lois, because I lost something." The little one went direct to the point,

as soon as she could control her voice.

"I thought I saw you looking for something. Hurry up, and tell me what it was — it'll soon be dark, so we can't search."

"Oh, I hope we can find it! You see — you know — well, we have a picture of my big brother

Howell" (the listener started) "at our house, and I like to take it down and look at it, because I can't look at him — yet. He's 'Missing,' you know."
"He's what?" asked Howell Bradford's sweet-

heart.

"It said he's 'Missing after break '-" she began, the first impression persisting. "No: I mean after Gettysburg. That means that he hasn't come back

- but he's coming," she added confidently.

"Did Mother tell you about the sholdier in Chick - Chickargo that couldn't remember his name? She didn't?" as Lois, her hands shaking so that she had to lay down her sewing, faltered a negative. "The paper said he was hit on the head in the war." She went on to tell the story, with eager interest. It was good to be able to talk about Howell to some one who wouldn't tell her to "Hush up!" or "Run away and play!" as had been the case at home, ever since Father's last pronouncement in the matter.

"And Mother saw him on the cars —"

"What are you saying, child?" cried Lois, her

face as white as a ghost's.

"She thought she saw him on the cars, the day I went to have my picture taken, and didn't. But Father said it wasn't him, and that we mustn't say any more about him coming back. I heard them talking about it when they thought I was asleep, but I wasn't —" She broke off hastily, remembering the stigma of "eavesdropper," and cast an apprehensive glance at Lois.

"Go on — tell me the rest!" the girl urged; and Bess, relieved that her slip had gone unnoticed, said, "There isn't any more to go on — only about the picture. Miss Lois — I've lost it!"

"Lost it! Why, where did you have it, to lose

it?"

- "Well, you see -- "the culprit breathed a burdened sigh -" I love to look at Howell's picture, so's I won't forget how he looked, you know -" (she was a year old when he went away), "and so's I'll know him when he comes back. I have to take his picture down off the mantel to see it good, and to-day - to-day," she repeated, fingering her apron in embarrassment, "Mother was coming, and well — the day I hid the picture in the kitchen table drawer, and forgot it, Mother said she'd spank me if I took it down again. Mother was coming," she again explained, "so I just put the picture in my little basket, and came on up here to pick strawberries with Burfa. And then it rained, and we didn't go to pick strawberries, and now it's lost, and - Oh! I don't know what Mother'll say!" She put her head down on Lois's white bed, and cried distressfully. "And now - now I'll forget how he looks!"
- "Bess, see here; didn't you and Bertha go up in the garret to play when the rain came on? And didn't you take the little basket up with you?" Lois asked.

"Yessir! that's just where I left it!" cried Bess, jumping up, and heading for the garret stairs.

Triumphant but subdued, she descended the gar-

ret stairs with her recovered treasure.

"Now listen to me, Bess," said Lois. "You must

promise me not to take the picture from its place again. It's the only picture your folks have of Howell since he was a little bit of a boy; and if you should lose it — as you certainly will if you keep carrying it about with you — I'm afraid to think of what your mother will say or do."

"But I can't half see it up on that high mantel," demurred Bess, beginning to sniffle again. "And, if I can't see it, how am I going to remember how he looked? How am I to know him when he comes

back, I'd like to know?"

"Well, if you won't promise, I can't help you. Just see how shabby the frame is already, from being handled and carried around! And the glass is cracked, right above the face. I don't know but that I ought to let your mother spank you! I was going to ask her not to."

"I'll promise!" she capitulated. "But now I'll have to forget how he looks, and 'tisn't fair! If 'twas your brother, you wouldn't want to forget how he looked! Would you?"

Lois walked slowly about the room once or twice, without replying. Then she sat down on the bed, and drew the child up beside her. "Bess, can you

keep a secret?" she asked.

"That means not to tell something, doesn't it?"
Bess queried, instantly brightening. "'Course I can keep a secret! I never told nobody that Chinney told a sto—" she clapped her hand over her mouth, and looked up at Lois, wide-eyed.

"I think I can trust you not to tell if I show you something," Lois said, ignoring the slip, although the

corners of her mouth were twitching slightly. "See here, then: so you'll not forget how Howell looked—" she pressed the spring of the locket she wore, and held it open before Bess's eyes. "I'll let you look at my picture of him, sometimes when there's nobody else around."

After her first gasp of astonishment, the child was silent a full minute. Then — "Why — where — how —" she groped. Everything seemed suddenly

to be topsy-turvy.

"Howell had two pictures taken the day he went away, and he gave one to me. He — he liked me,

too," Lois said steadily.

"Did he?" asked the small Bess, lost in speculation. "Oh, yes! I know now! Mother told Cousin Winnie you was going to be her daughter. That would make you all our sister, wouldn't it? And of course Howell would like his sister! We all would!"

Lois stooped and kissed the eager little face, and the child put her arms around Lois's neck and squeezed her tight, without quite knowing why.

"And — and you'll let me talk about him sometimes, won't you?" she whispered, her chin quivering. "You think he's only 'Missing,' don't you? You think he'll come home some day?"

Long ago the girl had given up thinking it; but now hope sprang to life again, kindled from the lit-

tle flame in the childish heart.

"Yes I do, little sister — I do think he'll come back!" she whispered through tears.

CHAPTER X

THE FRONT GATE

FTER the war," in the simple life of the Bradford family—as in that of the storied Primroses—small events served as milestones. To Elizabeth Bess, the building of a new picket fence to replace the old panel one marked an epoch; the purchase of a new book was only less exciting. And both these things had now happened simultaneously!

"New" book in this case did not mean new publication; it meant just what the words express — a new book. "The Children of the Abbey" was its title, and the whole family was on tiptoe over the

reading of it.

Such a condition is smile provoking in these days, when every village has its public library, every hamlet its "author," and the flow of new books is unceasing. But in the Sixties, except in large cities, public libraries were unknown and books were few and high-priced. Possibly people were more modest: not every one who could wield a pen felt called upon to write a book. Writers—the general run—certainly were more modest than are some of their craft to-day: when Mother went to buy a book, she did not feel it incumbent upon her to look through

it to learn whether it was fit to put into her daughter's hands. The salacious book was the exception, and its author was anathema!

Sara, whose convalescence was slow, was reading her book out under the "Northern Spy" apple tree, and Bess was watching the carpenter nailing on pickets. Her satisfaction in the new fence was tempered by a haunting fear that the gate would be an ordinary picket one, whereas she wanted a "fancy" one, like the one the Cones had. She mentioned her preference to Father, who only laughed, whereat she went into her shell, and said no more to him about it, but she threw out sundry hints to Mr. Hewitt, the carpenter. She even brought out her picture of the lady and little girl and the beautiful gate, and informed him that a gate like that was the kind she would like.

But Mr. Hewitt was sphinxlike. Bess caught him winking at Bruno, his dog, and saw Bruno wink back at him, which exchange of amenities made them look more alike than ever!

It was a fancy of hers that all the neighbourhood dogs resembled their owners. The Bradfords' Nero, for instance, had an honest face and kind, like William's. Needless to say, he was far and away the handsomest dog in town, as Will was the handsomest boy!

"Chinney's" dog was an alert, good-natured little fellow, with hair the colour of his master's sandy whiskers. Mrs. Cone's Jack, who padded after her everywhere, and "played the banjo" when you scratched his back, was large and gentle, like his mistress. The Hortons' Fido was tall and lean and pessimistic, like Charlie.

But the most remarkable resemblance of all existed between Mr. Hewitt and his Bruno. Mr. Hewitt had shrewd, grey, Yankee eyes, always with a question mark in them, and the question mark extended to his forehead, which was one field of slanting wrinkles. So was Bruno's. There was a humorous quirk at one corner of the man's mouth, and the same at the dog's. Even the perk of Bruno's clipped ears made the child think of Mr. Hewitt; why, she could not have told.

When all was done but the gate, and the frame of it was being put together, Bess's limit of self-repression was reached. "What kind of a front gate are you going to make, Mr. Hewitt?" she demanded.

"Front gate?" echoed he. "Why — we're going to have a front gate," he repeated, straightening up and squinting along a chalkline. "We're going to have a front gate that'll cost five — hundred — dollars!" He turned a grin and a twinkle on Bruno, who turned a grin and a twinkle on him; and his questioner knew that the gate was going to be just a common, ordinary, everyday picket one!

Without another word, Elizabeth Bess turned and started for the house. Mother, standing in the doorway, spoke to her as she went in, but not trusting her voice to answer, the child hurried up the two flights to the garret, where the old rush cradle rocked under the eaves. Old Blacky, her cat, was sleeping in it,

but she dumped him out, and, taking his place, cried herself stormily to sleep.

Then Mother went out, and she and Mr. Hewitt

talked together for a few minutes.

After a while the little one came slowly down stairs, rubbing her eyes with one smudgy hand, and trailing a crumpled hair ribbon. Sara, her finished book under her arm, met her sister in the hall, and putting an arm around her, drew her out into the kitchen to wash her face. Mother was at the sewing machine in the sitting-room.

"Here, Bess," she called, "take this oilcan out to Mr. Hewitt, and tell him to oil the hinges of the

new gate; it squeaks like everything!"

Listlessly the child obeyed. Gloomily with bent head, she scuffed along the walk, until suddenly the possibilities of that oilcan unfolded themselves before her, as her thumb pressed the bottom of the can. Jet after jet of oil sprinkled the gravel.

"Well," challenged Mr. Hewitt, "how do you

like the new gate?"

The angry red flared into her face, and, "None of your business!" was on the tip of her tongue, when her eye lit upon the marvel. For a moment she stood silent, taking in its beauties, then, speeding back along the path she called out to Mother and Sara, standing laughing in the doorway—

"'Tisn't a picket one! 'Tisn't a picket one! It's prettier'n Mrs. Cone's — It did cost five hundred

dollars!"

So little do we know of values, when "Going on Six!"

CHAPTER XI

"FRIDAY FOR CROSSES!"

DON'T care - I am mad at him! I wouldn't have got up early and gone off to the woods without him!" muttered the small Bess. Which was true: her bed was very dear to her, es-

pecially o' mornings.

"Old Billy Bradford!" She caught herself up sharply, remorse following hard upon the heels of crime, and turned to see if any one had heard the unforgivable words. Now she had done it - had put herself on a level with that bad Bunt Horton,

who always called Wee-um "Billy!"

Sitting on the back stoop, shelling corn into her apron, Bess determined upon a plan of action. would follow William after she had carried the corn down to the pond, and seen the ducks dive for it. There might be a duck egg in the water; when, William being away, it would be her duty to recover it, but that would not take long!

Sure enough, there was an egg — a beautiful, pale green egg; but it was out beyond the sunfish's bed. And Father said I must never wade out beyond the sunfish's bed. It's only a little, teeny, weeny way

past, though; maybe I can r-e-a-c-h --" She reached, far; one hand on the sunfish rock. Then her foot slipped, and she fell forward with a great splash. Puffing and spluttering she scrambled to her feet, and up on the sunfish rock, where she

viewed herself with a critical eye.

"I told you, Lizabeth Bess Bradford, that Father said not to go past the sunfish's bed!" she said severely. "But you would go! And now look at your span-new apron! 'Tisn't fit to be seen. And what Mother'll say, I cert'n'y don't know. Maybe I can wash it," she said hopefully, after a little. "'Course I can wash it, and then nobody'll know!"

Taking off the garment, she soused it up and down in the gravelly bed of the sunfish, to the hot indignation of the proprietors, which, with agitated fins and tails, dashed about beyond the desecrated area.

Having spread the apron on the grass, its owner eyed it dubiously. Its appearance was not reassuring. She had fallen squarely upon the egg, and that,

with the mud, made a bad combination.

William had remarked the evening before that the "Dutchmen's breeches" (wild dielytra) was blooming in the Ledge pasture. Perhaps he had gone to get some. She would go and meet him; he ought to

be coming home by now!

It was fortunate for Bess, in her wet clothing, that the late May day was like one in midsummer. As she climbed the ledge, the steam rose in little clouds above her head; the soggy garments impeded her, and it was a tired youngster that sank down beside the dielytra, her arms already full of red columbine picked by the way.

The little white hearts swaying in the wind showed

that no vandal hand had touched them: William had not been there. Not a little disturbed by this discovery, she began to wonder what she had better do: wait a while and see if he would come, or go back? It was a long way back, and she was so tired! And if William came, he would take her home pick-a-back!

Something cold and damp touched her cheek, and Nero stood panting beside her. Dropping her flowers, she squeezed his head against her breast until he whimpered protestingly. The woods had begun to seem lonely, but now they were not any more. The old dog stretched himself out in the shade, his fat side making such an inviting pillow that she laid her head upon it. . . .

She was awakened by the dog's growling, and struggling to free himself. Her startled eyes, as she sat up, met those of a rough looking man standing

a few feet away.

"Hello, little gyerl!" grinned the stranger, and Bess shivered without knowing why. "Takin' a nap, was ye? What a nice locket ye got! Le's see what's inside of it."

"Yes, it's solid gold," replied its owner complacently. "But there isn't a thing in it only glass. We went on a rainy day, and couldn't have one took."

"Too bad! I suppose, now, your folks have lots of nice things at home — and your pa has lots of money."

"I s'pose he has," Pa's daughter admitted, again complacently. "And Sara's got a new set of

jew'lry. Be still, Nero! you growl so loud I can't talk!"

"Where do ye live when ye're home?"

- "Why, down there," she pointed. "No, I guess it's over that way. I guess maybe I forget but Nero'll take me home."
- "Make him lie down, so's I can look at yer locket; take it off."
- "Oh, I couldn't take it off! Come, Nero, let's go!"

"Don't be in a hurry; I want to see that locket. I don't believe there's even a place for a picture in it!" bullied the tramp. "Give it here. And make that pup lie down. He's an infernal nuisance!"

The Wee One didn't know what an "infernal nuisance" was, but she did know that it was an opprobrious epithet. "He is not a 'fernal nuisance," she bristled. "Now you go 'way, or I'll sic him on

you!"

"Huh!" scoffed the tramp, deceived by Nero's forbearance. "He's only a bag of wind!" Picking up a stick, he made a rush at him, and a grab for the locket and chain. Bess screamed and stumbled back, but the dog, with a hoarse roar, sprang at the throat of the robber; missed him, and tumbled into a hole left by an up-turned tree. This gave the villain a start; but Nero was only a few rods in the rear as pursuer and pursued disappeared among the trees.

Forsaken by Nero, the scared child did not know which way to turn. "Wee-um!" she screamed wildly. "Wee-um — WEE-UM!" And off in

the distance, William heard and answered, and sped,

a very Mercury, to the rescue.

It was a disappointed and disgruntled William that the cry in the wilderness had come to. While he would not have admitted that he shared the little sister's illusions regarding Howell, the fact was that ever since the day Mother had been so sure she saw him on the train William was looking for the wanderer to return. He had the utmost confidence in his mother's discernment, and felt that she could not make a mistake where one of her children was concerned.

William was but a little chap — just Bess's age now — when Howell went to the war, but he remembered distinctly the big brother's love of nature, amounting almost to a passion. He used to take William with him on many of his woods' excursions, carrying him when he was tired, as William now did with Bess. They used to follow the little streams to their sources among the hills searching in their beds for treasures. (William still kept Howell's collection of fossils and odd stones and Indian arrowheads.)

To William, there seemed nothing incongruous in the notion that some instinct would bring his brother back to the wild places he had loved, even as the birds found their way back. Why would he not come home, if so near to it? Well — of course he would, if he were himself, but there was no accounting for the vagaries of one who had been hit on the head with a cannon-ball!

Illogical as were these hopes, William clung to

them. To-day, in going over the old stamping ground, he had found a little cabin in a notch of the hills, and the nebulous hope had assumed definite shape. It was only when, after scouting around, the investigator routed out a couple of smoke-blackened charcoal burners, that he gave up the chase in disgust, and was gloomily plodding homeward when he heard his sister's hail.

As the reunited pair walked up the home lane with Nero trotting behind, they heard Sara in the kitchen, chanting an old rhyme:

"Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses — Saturday, no luck at ——

The last line was interrupted by a scream, which brought the youngsters on the double quick, to be met by dire disaster at the kitchen door. Mother had gone to town, and Sara, energetically doing the housework, had swept one of the feet from under the kitchen stove, which now stretched sprawling half way across the kitchen, as it seemed. A boiling cascade fell from the nozzle of the teakettle, smoke was pouring from the unjointed stovepipe — and Father was forty miles away! That is, he might as well have been as to be off in the south meadow, far out of sight and hearing!

Sweeping Bess behind him, William seized the kettle, and set it outside the door. He tried desperately to remember what Father had done when, once before, this thing had happened; but aside from keeping falling sparks from setting the floor on fire, he couldn't think of a thing! The stove was too heavy for them to lift, and —

"What's the matter here — what's the matter?" cried a heavenly voice, with a familiar little squeak in it, and Chinney came bouncing in. Bess did not know until that moment that she had been vociferating her alarm! Catching up the little "cricket" in which the dolls were slumbering, he dumped them out, and planted it beside the stove. Then he requisitioned the ironing board which, thrust under the stove for a lever, the end resting on the stool, raised the fiery furnace to a level.

It was the work of a moment for William to adjust the foot. Then Chinney leaped upon a chair, and as if he had been a magician and said "Presto, change!" the smoking pipe slipped into place, and ceased to smoke.

"That's the time o' day!" said Chinney then, and having wiped his hands upon his overalls, he tossed the Wee One to the ceiling. "Good-bye — I'm in a hurry!" he told the grateful trio, and was gone.

William started for the well for a pail of water, his little sister at his heels. There was a perennial charm about the well. You let the bucket go down, down, until it hit the water with a splash; filled, sank and came up again, sparkling and dripping within its mossy walls.

Now, as William reached in to grasp the handle and pour the water through the spout into his pail, an awful thing happened: the bucket broke loose from its rope, and fell like lead back down the well. With a terrific splash that sent the water above their heads, it sank from sight, while the freed rope whipped like a snake around the windlass.

So, now! Of what good was it to be saved from fire, only to die of thirst? Bess looked with startled eyes into William's face. But he said, with an effect of cheerfulness, "Well, the next thing is to get the creeper, and fish it out!"

"What's the 'creeper,' Wee-um?" his small sister asked, a shudder rippling up and down her spine

as she pronounced the uncanny word.

"Oh, you'll see!" he assured her. To himself he was saying, bitterly, "Friday for crosses, Friday for crosses!" Which surely was so — for this was Fri-

day!

The implement which William brought from the woodshed loft, was shaped somewhat like a four-pronged anchor. Bess could fancy it creeping, creeping hideously around in the depths of the well, searching for the recreant bucket, and grappling it.

The creeper was not so smart, however; first it brought up a cherrytree branch, then a sodden little straw hat with faded ribbons, that had been missing many moons. But suddenly the line tightened in his hands, and William's face grew tense as slowly up from the depths he drew the prize. Sara, who, from the vantage ground of her three years' seniority, had come 'to warn, to counsel and command,' was making pessimistic comment, for the creeper had a very precarious hold upon its prey — was bringing it up literally by the ear. Seeing which, William was excitedly (though unconsciously) saying, "Look out, Bess — Look out!"

But Bess was looking in (to the well) with her whole being in her eyes. The bucket had almost reached the curb, when it jerked its ear from the creeper's hold, and sank again into the depths!

William's cry of disappointment was the last straw upon the child's overworked nerves. Standing on tiptoe, and balancing on her stomach across the low curb, as the bucket fell she instinctively grabbed for it.

And William would have had more than the bucket to drag for had not Father at that moment appeared upon the scene, and caught a copper-toed shoe in its downward flight!

Then Father turned his hysterical small daughter over to Sara, and went to work — as fathers do —

and brought up that bucket!

At the dinner table, Elizabeth Bess told the story of her adventure with the robber, and Nero naturally came in for a good deal of commendation. Still, the old fellow was not happy. Every little while he would put his head down and paw at his mouth in a

distressing way.

"There's something the matter with the dog—must have got a bone fast on his teeth," said Father, and prepared to investigate; but he was saved the trouble. With a last great effort, Nero succeeded in dislodging the obstruction, and disclosing it to view. It was not a bone, but a dirty bit of cloth that had caused the trouble.

The elders were wondering over this, when sud-

denly the small Bess struck her hands together:

"It's a piece of the tramper's pants!" she cried.

CHAPTER XII

A FOURTH OF JULY CHRONICLE

66 OURTH o' July " in Elizabeth Bess Bradford's time and town, was almost as "safe and sane" as the same date in 1917, but from a different cause. In those days it did not need a town ordinance to regulate the sale of fire-works. Circumstances, in the shape of an attenuated purse,

were likely to do that for you.

Where now a child gets a nickel or a dime for some little service the coin of the tribute with which William and Bess were most familiar was the big, oldfashioned cent, and even these were not always to be had for the asking. The bestowal of a three-cent "shinplaster" or its silver equivalent was an event; that of a ten-cent one marked an epoch. But until recently, Bess would have none of these if a "coin," as the big cent was called, could be had instead. Size was what counted in her eyes.

Two little tin banks stood side by side on the kitchen shelf, and Bess loved to take them down, "heft" them appraisingly, shake them violently, then flaunt in William's face the fact of her larger wealth, as evidenced by weight and sound. While the sly William salved his conscience with the reflection that if the big pennies made his little sister

happy, then it was all right to exchange them for her threes!

But, be it said for William that he was, like Robin Hood, generous with his ill-gotten gains, much of which eventually went to buy "something nice for Bess." There was, however, one day on which he was positively stingy, and that was the Fourth of

July.

On the day before the Fourth, William always managed to get to town. Then he would make the round of the stores where fireworks were sold to see if, perchance, some philanthropist had cut the price of firecrackers from ten cents straight to three packs for a quarter. Formerly (in William's young days) this never happened before the afternoon of the Fourth, but now, for a year or two, outside some obscure little shop, would appear this heart-stirring announcement:

FIRECRACKERS, THREE PACKS FOR A QUARTER!

And William, possessing himself of the three packs—and some torpedoes for Bess—would hand over the shinplasters and coins like one paying a king's ransom. Then came a quarter of a pound of powder, and this might not be omitted, whatever else went by the board; for this was to be used in the culminating event of the anniversary, when, at night, William with his gun over his shoulder, and Lizabeth Bess tagging behind, would climb to the top of the Round Hill, there to "fire off" his gun at intervals until his powder was gone.

On the morning of the Fourth, he ceremoniously bestowed the torpedoes upon his sister. "Aw, give me some firecrackers too, Wee-um!" she begged.

" Just a few!"

"Oh, well, if you want to shoot your fingers off! You know firecrackers are not for girls!" As he was doling them out, Father came up. "William, if you want to use that gun to-night, you'll have to draw the charge beforehand," he directed. "It's been in the gun so long, it's not safe to fire it."

William squirmed in disgust. "Oh, yes it is,

Father! It hasn't been in so long!"

"Do as I tell you! Your Uncle James tried to fire an old charge like that once, and the moment he touched the trigger the gun exploded, and it was just by good luck that he wasn't killed. You draw that charge!"

Elizabeth Bess, thrilling with horror at the fate which had so nearly overtaken Uncle James, the Nimrod of the family (who was away now, in the South), followed her brother out to the woodshed when he

went to perform the hated operation.

First he took the old iron ramrod with the screw end and sent it rattling down the gun barrel. Then, twisting it around until the point caught in the wadding, William slowly, slowly withdrew the rod until, with the disc almost in sight, the screw point pulled loose; when there was nothing to do but push the wadding back down the barrel, and begin all over again.

William looked so fierce when this happened that his small sister dared not say "Too bad!" And

when it happened a second time, and he hissed through his set teeth, "I knew how it would be — I just knew!" she was afraid even to look her commiseration. Bess was afraid that if it should occur a third time he might say something that bad boys say when they get mad, and knowing that she would not be able to stand that, she rose softly from the chopping block, and began tiptoeing out of the woodshed.

"Come back here!" called William, so suddenly that she tripped over the sill, and went sprawling on hands and knees. However, she did not so much as think of crying — so greatly did William's troubles overtop hers — but turned and gazed solemnly at

him.

"What are you looking like a funeral for?" demanded William, but more gently. "Take this ramrod, and put it back in the kitchen closet, will you?"

"Oh-h! You got it out, Wee-um?"
"No. I'm going to shoot it out."

"Oh! Wee-um Bradford! Father said --"

"Yes! And Mother said," he mimicked, "to pick the currants before she and Father came home from town. How'll I get 'em picked if I've got to waste the whole forenoon on a fool gun, I'd like to know?"

"Why, I'll help you, Wee-um. Only — please don't fire it! You know Father said: 'The minute he touched the trigger!—'" She repeated the words in a shaking whisper.

"Oh, but that was a different kind of a gun," parried William. Then, seeing the distress in her face, he relented. "All right, Lizabeth Bess. Tell you what we'll do: run in the house, and get me a long piece of string. I'll set the gun up in the crotch of the walnut tree, tie the string to the trigger, and then we'll stand away off, and pull it. You can pull it then, if you want to."

Pull it Lizabeth Bess did, shutting her eyes tight as she did so. But the gun did not explode: the string,

a piece of common twine, had broken.

"Darn the thing!" William grunted. "Go to the barn, quick, and get Father's ball of cord out of the tool chest!"

"You - you won't shoot it off, Wee-um?"

"What d' you take me for? Didn't I say I

wouldn't? Hurry up!"

As she pattered up the stone steps between the barnyard and yard proper William took the gun out of the crotch and was looking it over, when Bunt Horton appeared out of the woods opposite, and hopped across the brook. And like a flash it came to William that he would never hear the last of it if Bunt Horton should see him shooting off a gun with a string! And in that instant, he put the gun to his shoulder, and fired into the air.

The tame little weapon didn't even kick. But Bess, half way to the barn, heard the report, and came rushing back, expecting to find the mangled remains of her brother, if, perchance, even these were

left!

Down the steps she came, as with wings; and Charlie, with the intention of jumping out later and scaring her, dodged behind the big hickory. William turned to confront his sister, whose face, at first

white with terror, crimsoned with anger at sight of

the gun in his hands.

"You did shoot it off, didn't you?" she blazed.
"You just wanted to get me out of the way, didn't you? I'll never b'lieve you again, as long as I live and breave!"

As her voice rose in a piercing crescendo and William made no answer, Bunt thrust his head out from behind the tree. The satisfaction of putting "that little Bradford smarty" in the wrong was doubtless what led him to say—"Aw, shut up, you little spit-

fire, you! Billy didn't do it - I done it!"

William, who knew now that the big boy had seen and heard the whole thing, opened his mouth to contradict him when his sister interposed. Reaching up, and taking him by the jacket fronts—"Oh, 'scuse me, Wee-um!" she pleaded, her face a study of mingled relief, remorse and joy. "I just knew you wouldn't tell a story!" Hearing which, Bunt laughed uproariously. And Bess, who disliked and feared Charlie Horton, waited only to stick out her tongue at him before fleeing back to the swing under the apple-tree by the house.

Meantime William, in a whirl of varied emotions, had turned upon his whilom chum. "You had to come snoopin' round, didn't you?" he demanded. "Next time, just mind your own business, will you?"

When Bunt's astonishment permitted him to speak—"Well, if you ain't the darndest cuss!" he exploded. "Just 'cause I wanted to keep that little wild cat from sailin' into you tooth and nail, you turn 'round and give me Hail Columbia! All right,

sonny! All right! Next time he can shoot off his little gun with his little string, and nobody shall stop him!" And like a new Colossus, Bunt spanned the flood with his long legs, and disappeared again into the woods.

On his way to the house with the gun, the sight of the little huddled figure in the swing disarmed whatever resentment William might have felt toward her, and transferred it to the score standing against that miscreant, Bunt Horton.

Lizabeth Bess was all right — she was just looking out for him. And she thought he was good — that he was honourable! And he to break his word, and then like a big coward, let Bunt Horton lie for him!

But he wasn't going to tell her! No, sir — not after that look in her eyes when she said "'Scuse me, Wee-um!" Only — Oh, hang it all! William hadn't known that a fellow could feel so mean!

Father and Mother had returned from town; dinner was over, and William and Bess had gone back to the currant picking. The sun was hot, and William was cross. Well, he needn't be! His sister guessed she had been picking currants in the sun, too. The back of her neck was ready to blister that minute!

Well, if he wanted to be cross, he could be cross! Thank goodness, here was Chinney, driving home from town. Maybe — perhaps — sometimes Chinney brought candy when he came from town. Bess went and stood by the five hundred dollar gate, wearing her sweetest smile.

Sure enough, Chinney had brought the candy, and something else, too. He called out to Father that he had a dispatch for him; and handed him a letter in a yellow envelope, with printing on it; and tossed the bag of candy to the Wee One.

Mother came out on the veranda, and read the message over Father's shoulder, (there was only a line or two of it), and they laughed together, as if over some very pleasant news. "I'll have to meet the six o'clock train," said Father; and Mother told him to bring home a good, big steak for supper. But when Elizabeth Bess asked what it was about, Father said it was to be a surprise, and wouldn't be cajoled into telling.

Hunting up Sara, Bess gave her a peppermint stick, and then went out to William, whose crossness fell from him like a garment at sight of the little paper bag. He knocked off work instantly, and the two worthies sat down in the shade and regaled them-

selves.

"Wee-um," queried the Wee One at the end of the first stick, "What's a dispratch letter?"

"A what?" asked William, in the tone that al-

ways made his small sister's face get red.

"A dispratch letter," she repeated firmly. "Chinney brought one to Father, and it was in a yellow envelope, with letters on it."

"He did! Did you hear Chinney say it was a dis-

patch?" asked William, waking up.

"Yes." She made a mental note of the correction. "And I asked Father what it said, and he said it was to be a s'prise. 'N' he told Mother he'd have to meet the six o'clock train, and Mother told

him to bring home a good big steak."

"Gee — Whittaker!" was William's comment, if comment it could be called. And he sat pondering, his jaws in suspended action.

"Do you s'pose, Wee-um —"

"I don't suppose a single thing!" he interrupted, getting to his feet. "If Father says it's to be a surprise, let it be a surprise. I like surprises — don't you?"

"Y-e-s, I s'pose so." She shook the last of the

candy crumbs into her mouth.

It was evening. Twilight was deepening into dusk, and the two children, sitting on the front porch, were straining their ears for the sound of wheels coming over the bridge. Suddenly Nero got up off the husk mat by the door, lifted his head high, and sniffed the air long and searchingly. Then he started on a brisk walk down the road.

"What does he see, Wee-um?" the Wee One

asked, sidling closer to his protecting arm.

"Guess it's what he hears. Come on — I hear the wagon!"

"Nero always waits for Father to come, Wee-um." The words came joggling out as she ran.

"He didn't this time. Don't step on yourself -

Baby! Look where you're going!"

"How can I look where I'm going, in the dark? Wee-um, there's some one with Father — I hear them talking! Don't go on, Wee-um — wait!" She drew him back into the shelter of the wagon shed,

where they stood shivering with excitement, and un-

spoken hope.

"Hullo!" cried a deep voice, and some one jumped out of the wagon, and grabbed both the children. Bess was being kissed and, as William dodged to escape such an indignity, a gleam from a window revealed the stranger's identity. "Youngsters, this is Uncle Jim!" cried Father at the same moment, and as he spoke, two young hearts with one accord sounded the depths of disappointment.

Bess didn't know Uncle Jim, and didn't want to know him! She wanted to scream and scratch and bite, and tear out handsful of the crisp hair that was tickling her sun-burned neck as the stranger carried her in. As for William, a feeling of anger toward his father swelled his heart as he led the horse into the stable. Why hadn't he told them who was coming? And why — why couldn't it have been his brother, not Father's — his own brother, Howell?

An hour later, the whole family — except Mother and Gran — were on their way to the Round Hill. William was carrying a big box of fireworks that Uncle Jim had brought; and Lizabeth Bess, also reconciled, was seated upon the stranger's shoulder when who should loom up in the faint moonlight but Charlie Horton.

Bess was willing to let by-gones be by-gones for the nonce, but the two boys eyed each other with never a thought of truce. Nero, however, quite unwitting that things had changed since yesterday when the two and he himself had gone on a snake hunt together,

halted directly in front of Charlie, and stood with head lifted and tail wagging, expectant of a pat.

William, whistling loudly, and ostensibly gazing straight ahead, with the corner of his eye saw the big boy impulsively put out his hand in passing and give the dog a couple of swift pats. And in a moment, the whole aspect of things had changed. Falling back a step, William called casually.

"Say, Bunt, come on along with us up on the hill. Uncle Jim's brought us a bushel of fireworks. Come

on - we'll have some fun!"

"I'm your huckleberry, Billy!" cried Bunt, and the two walked up the hill together.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN HATE WAS BORN!

OU go back, Bess — you can't go to-day," said William, closing the gate, with her on the yard side.

The little girl looked up at him blankly. Then a smile broke over her face; she clapped a hand on her

bare head, and said happily,

"Oh, I forgot, Wee-um! I'll go right back and

get my shaker!"

"The shaker won't make any difference — you can't come. Go on up to Bertha's house, and play with her."

"You're just a-plaguing me, 'cause I forgot to ask Mother again. I'll run right along and ask her, Wee-um!" She turned, and confronted Bunt Horton, who had come up through the lane, and was standing with his gun across his arm. He reached

out and caught her, as she was running back.

"No use askin' your mother," he said bluntly. "Billy and me are goin' huntin', and we can't have girls along." The way he said "girls" made this one's blood boil. But she merely flashed a contemptuous glance at him, twitched her arm from his grasp, and turned again to her brother.

"I'll go get my bow-narrow that you made for me,

and just you and me go, Wee-um?" she appealed, in

a confidential whisper.

William's heart almost failed him. Whatever made her so set on going, to-day? Usually, the sight of a gun was enough for her! It was mighty hard to disappoint her when she wanted anything so bad. Now, when she pushed the gate open, and came out and took him by the lapels of his coat, he said with a gentleness that even the presence of cynical Bunt Horton could not lessen,

"No, no, Bess, it's too far! You run along up to Bertha's, and maybe you and I'll take our bows 'n' ar-

rows and go to-morrow. Good-bye!"

Without another word she turned and walked toward the house, her head held firm and high. On the way, she ran plump into the grindstone, but not for worlds would she have had them know that it was tears — blinding tears! — that made her do it.

William turned at the Rye Lot bars and waved to her. "Good-bye, Bess!" he called again. "Maybe I'll bring you a live flyin' squirrel!" but

she made no sign.

"Darn it!" muttered William, who felt mean— "meaner'n pusley!" "I suppose I might have taken her," he said, quite to himself, as he thought, but Bunt heard him and snorted.

"You're a reg'lar fool about that young 'un, Billy. How in tunket could you take her a-huntin', I'd like

to know!"

"I don't call it huntin' when you're along; them big feet o' yourn scare everything out of range," replied William, lapsing into Bunt's vernacular. Bunt thought it was "sissified" to use anything approaching good English. "And I could carry her when she got tired!" he added shamelessly.

"Not and go with me, you couldn't," countered Bunt, ignoring the delicate thrust at his sportsmanship. "I don't want no circus parade along when I

go a-huntin'!"

"Well, I do' know's it's abs'lutely necessary for you to go along," observed William with rising gorge. "I'd like to know who asked you to go huntin' in our woods, anyway! Go on home if you want to! It's a pretty cold day when I've got to ask Mister Bunt Horton's permission to take my little sister anywhere! Go on home, if you want to!" he shouted getting madder every minute.

"Oh, shucks!" deprecated Bunt, who knew that the best hunting ground for squirrels anywhere about was the Bradford beech woods. "What makes you so all-fired touchy to-day? I didn't say anything to

make you get up on your ear! Come along!"

"For two cents, I wouldn't go another step!" declared William truculently. He braced his legs wide apart, and stood glaring at his companion, whose meekness went to William's head like wine!

"Well, stay where y'are, then! I'm goin' a-huntin'." And the big boy strode off into the woods. William, nonplussed, strode after him—if the movements of his stocky legs could be called a stride. Beaten at his own game, he was at a loss what to do next, when something gleaming white on a nearby tree caught his attention, and gave him an idea.

"Oh, Bunt, come on back a minute — I want you!" he called.

"Well, come and get me!" Bunt flung back with-

out stopping.

"But I want to show you something! Bet you never saw anything like it before. Hurry up before

it gets away! Hurry up!"

Bunt's curiosity got the better of him and he came running back to where William was crouching and peering intently into the branches of a big beech.

"Where is it? What is it?" he asked eagerly,

following William's pointing finger.

"Right up there. No, you're looking too high. Can't you see it? Right there below the first limb!"

Bunt had seen it all the time, but never dreamed that this was what William had called him back for. Now, dropping his gaze to the spot indicated, the blood welled up into his freckled face as he read this sign:

"All Persons Are Forbidden to Hunt or Trespass on This Property Under Penalty of the Law! "William H. Bradford."

"That means you, Mr. Bunt Horton!" William gleefully told him. "Now you get off my father's

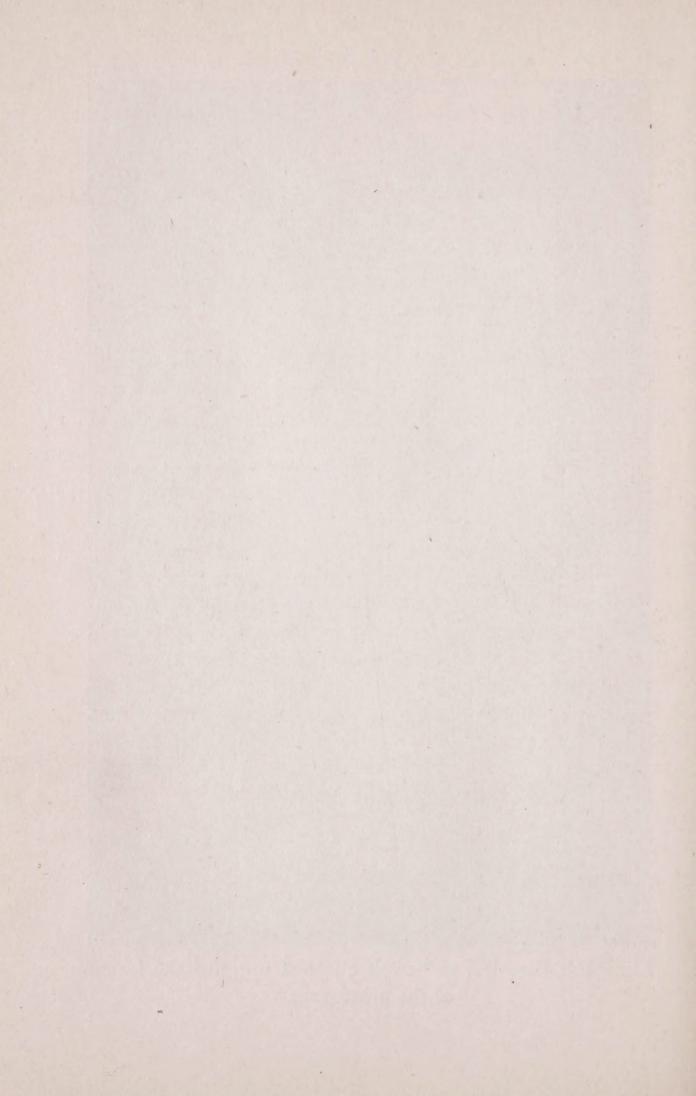
property. Skip! Skedaddle! Git!"

"Not till I've wiped up the ground with you, you miserable little sneak!" And reaching out a long arm, Bunt took a twist in William's hair with his talon-like fingers.

"Aw, get out! Can't you take a joke?" cried



Elizabeth Bess left to herself climbed up onto the frame of the grindstone



William, feeling his scalp cracking. "Quit it, I tell you! Ow! QUIT IT!"

Bunt let loose a hair or two. "You goin' to be decent, then, and not have so much lip?" he questioned.

"I'll be just as decent as you are, and no more!"

They made a few passes at each other, scuffled a bit - a friendly bout - then, being boys, they started

off again quite amicably.

Elizabeth Bess, left to herself, climbed up on the grindstone frame, and wiped away the tears with her apron. She had never had any real love for Charlie Horton, but now she hated him! How she hated him! She ground her little teeth together at the

thought of him.

Oh, if she could only — if she could only — let's see: if she could only get a big tiger, and shut him up - let's see where: why, in the henhouse (of course when all the hens were out), and Charlie Horton should come down the road - Oh, goody! that was it: Charlie Horton should come down the road with a little basket in his hand, and say to her: "Say! Has your mother got some eggs to lend my mother? 'Cause she's goin' to make a big weddin' cake for supper, and she hasn't got enough!"

And then she, Elizabeth Bess, would say, "Oh, yes! there's some in the hen-house; you go get

'em!"

And then Charlie Horton went into the hen-house, and she ran quick and turned the button on the door, and called out to him, "Now, Charlie Horton, will you call my Wee-um 'Billy' again? And will you take him away and not let him take me? And will

you --'

But the awful screams and growls that came from the hen-house, and the horrible, struggling noises, were too much for her new-born hate. She reached up and tried to turn the button back, but it wouldn't turn back! Frantically she dug her finger nails into it and swung her weight on it, and screamed and shrieked for MOTHER!

Uncle Jim got there first, just in time to catch his niece, who was falling off the grindstone in the throes of a hideous dream!

"Oh, I'm glad I didn't catch the tiger, Uncle Jim!" she panted. And shuddered, away down inside of her at the thought of the frightful noises.

"You mean, that the tiger didn't catch you," he

laughed.

"Tell you what I'm going to do," she confided, after a period of meditation; "I'm just going to wait till Howell comes home, and I'll bet he'll fix that Charlie Horton. You just wait and see!"

Uncle Jim looked at her with narrowed eyes.

"When's he coming?" he asked casually.

"Oh, I don't know! I'm pret' near tired waiting for him," she said, and slipped from his lap to go and see if William might be in sight. She hoped Charlie Horton wouldn't be with him. Elizabeth Bess was beginning to feel a little ashamed of her tantrum. Mother was very strong on the Golden Rule. And the Catechism said that Anger was one of the Seven deadly sins!

And perhaps — maybe Charlie Horton was not so ter'ble bad! She tried to think of some redeeming trait or action of his. He was good to his little white dog, Benny. He cried the day Benny fell in the cistern, and had lost his conscience when they pulled him out. (She quoted Sally — from memory — with some pride.) And Burfa — she liked her brother almost as well as —

But Elizabeth Bess would not pursue the demeaning simile — that was too much to expect! No: she could forgive Charlie Horton — if she must and Mother said no one could say "Our Father" unless they forgave, but if he should come back with William, and should speak to her, she knew that it would make her sick — sick at her stummick!

My! but it was a long morning! Other mornings, she would be picking apples, or husking corn, or riding in the jinricksha behind William's flying heels, or — anyway, she would be where he was — dear Wee-um! Was that him, 'way off there in the woods path? And alone? Now, she wouldn't have to be sick at her stummick!

Down the lane and across the Rye Lot she ran, her hard little soles taking no note of the stubbles; and looked up at him as Nero did — with her heart in her eyes. William's own eyes brightened, and his mouth expanded in a happy grin at this change of front in his little partner. "I didn't get the squirrel — but hold your apron," he said, and emptied a pocketful of the first chestnuts into it.

Lizabeth Bess breathed an ecstatic sigh.

"I was mad at you this morning, Wee-um, but I ain't now," she said coyly. "I know it was that bad, old Charlie Horton that made you act so!"

William laughed, and swung her up on his back. "We got to hurry!" he said, hitting it up. "There's the Old Gong blowin' for noon, now!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE GROWN-UPS CONFER

HAT'S all this talk of little Bess's about Howell coming back?" asked Uncle Jim. The children had gone to bed, and the elders were sitting on the veranda in the warm September evening.

Lois Horton had called, and was sitting with them, and at the question, with one impulse the two women's hands met in a quick clasp in the friendly dark.

- "Several times, now, she's said something to that effect," Uncle Jim went on, "until I begin to wonder if there's anything to it—if the rest of you know something that, for some reason, I haven't been told of."
- "There isn't a thing to it," Father answered.

 "Of course you'd have been told if there was. It's just a notion of Bess's that we can't seem to get her out of. She heard some one reading the entry in the Bible, which states that Howell is missing, and she declares that that means he's coming back."

"I see; too bad!" said Jim. "I was hoping —"

"I am still hoping, Jim," said Mother quietly, although her voice was trembling. Then, whether it was the darkness or the presence of a new and sympathetic listener that gave her courage, she went on

rapidly to tell of the L'Estrange incident; and of her conviction (for it amounted to that) that she had seen her son on the train that day in the summer.

"L'Estrange: seems to me I heard something about that fellow," Jim answered. "I remember now - it was when I was in Boston, just before coming here. The Globe had quite a bit about him. It seems he travels for some big house that sends him all over the country - makes contracts, or establishes branches, or something of that sort. I didn't pay much attention, not being interested particularly. But he hopes in that way to find himself, as he says."

Lois cleared her throat. "Do you remember the

name of the firm he works for?" she asked.

"No, I don't; I don't believe it was given."

"You say it was in the Globe you saw it - the editor might know," said Mother. "He ought to know, since it was in his paper."

"Not necessarily," Jim smiled to himself at this ingenuousness. "But I'll write and ask him, if you wish. I think a good plan would be to put a personal in the New York Herald. Everybody reads the Herald personals."

"But how would you word it?" Lois asked. "There are probably lots of L'Estranges in the country, and if you said that he would hear of something to his advantage - the usual formula - it might at-

tract unscrupulous ones."

"We might tell him his name was Howell Bradford!" said Mother eagerly. "But no - that wouldn't do, for we don't know that it is."

"I advertised in both those papers last winter—and in a Chicago newspaper, too," said Father, quietly.

"William! You did! And you never told me!"

cried Mother.

"What was the use, when there was nothing to tell? Nothing came of it. I didn't get an answer except one from a crack-brained critter who must have thought I was another. You'd been worrying yourself to skin and bone ever since New Years, when this thing started. And I thought if I kept quiet, things would get back to normal after a while."

"And I thought you didn't care!" said Mother

softly.

"I know you did — you seemed to forget that he was my son, as well as yours," Father replied, his voice a little husky. They both seemed to forget that they were not alone, and a silence, embarrassing to the others, fell upon the group.

Lois broke it with a remark about its getting late, and rose to go. Jim got up and went with her, although the girl protested that the moon was rising

and that she was not a bit afraid!

"Well, I guess it's pretty near bedtime," said Father yawning, after the others had gone.

"Hadn't we better wait for Jim?" Mother ques-

tioned.

"Not if I know it! I'm tired. A pretty girl and a moonlight night are a combination that'll hold Jim some time, unless he's changed greatly. That is, of course, unless she gives him the cold shoulder — and I don't think she will."

"Why don't you think she will?" asked Mother

jealously.

"Why? Because, my dear, they're young." Mother sniffed. "Lois is a mighty nice girl," Father went on, unheeding the sniff. "And Jim's a fine fellow, and it's time he quit roving, and settled down. He'll be thirty-one in December. There's his half of the farm, that I'm not able to work as it ought to be done, even though William's been doing 'most a man's work the past year. We don't want to break him down."

"I guess we don't want to break him down!" said Mother. "All the same, I'm surprised and disappointed, if what you imagine about Lois is true. I—I thought—" a stinging pain contracted her throat, and she stopped.

"You thought a maid would be as loyal as a mother," he said gently, taking her hand. "'Tisn't

in nature, Anne!"

Mother pondered. "I think it is — in Lois's nature — looking back over the past four years," said she judicially. "That young surveyor last summer was crazy about her, and so was Doctor Wilbur's son. And if Jim wants to settle down, there are other girls!" And though Father smiled in the darkness, it was a pitying and tender smile.

CHAPTER XV

ABRAHAM'S "ACCIDENT"

HERE you are — six for you, and six for me," said William, counting out the arrows they had just made — of stiff, dry weed stalks, with a shingle nail inserted point first, in an end of each. The nails furnished the weight necessary for a straight flight; and, although not pointed, these nail-tipped shafts in the hands of a skilful archer might do considerable execution.

"And there's your bow." His sister took it from his hand, and examined it carefully — the smooth, elastic hickory withe, its ends notched for the bowstring that held them just the right distance apart. "It's an awful nice bow, Wee-um," she announced; and I'm awful glad to get it. I'm tired of sailing our boats, and skipping clam shells across the pond!"

"So'm I — kind of," William confessed. The children were sitting on the grassy little knoll back of the barn, with the big butternut tree bending its

wealth above them.

"Wee-um," his sister asked him abruptly, "what's another kind of a bow?" putting much stress on the vowel.

"Why, you have one on your hair," William enlightened her. Bess shook her head. "No —'tisn't that kind, either."

"Who said it? Where'd you hear it?" William

asked with interest.

"Why, last night after supper, when I was putting my dollies to sleep, and Mother 'n' Gran was doing the dishes—" (this painful circumstantial evidence was lest William should again accuse her of "eavesdropping"). "Gran said to Mother, Wasn't Uncle Jim getting to be Miss Lois's bow."

"She did! And what did Mother say?"

"Mother said 'Mercy! No.' And Gran said, 'Well, it looks like it, to me.' And then Mother said — Your arrow is longer'n mine, Wee-um."

"Go on - Mother said what?" demanded Wil-

liam.

"Mother said, 'Why, he's too old for her for one thing — Lois is barely twenty.' What is 'barely,' Wee-um?"

"That means that she's only just twenty. Well

- did Gran think Uncle Jim was too old?"

"I don't know; Sara came and put me to bed then. But what is a bow, Wee-um? You didn't tell me yet!"

"Why," said William blushing, "a beau is some

one that likes you, and gives you things."

"Oh!" cried Lizabeth Bess, enlightened.

Then you're my bow, Wee-um, 'cause you give me

things - and you like me, don't you?"

"'Course I do!" replied William frowning. "Get off my jacket! I had some crackers in that pocket, and I bet you've smashed 'em!" Thus he

diverted her mind from the ticklish subject; but he

himself kept up a lively thinking.

"Just see that old turkey gobbler, Wee-um!" cried his sister as a great, bronze Tom came strutting toward them. "He's after me the whole, blessed time, whenever I have a red dress on. He don't give me a mite of peace!"

"Watch me give him a scare," said William, fit-

ting an arrow to his bow.

"Oh, Wee-um - don't!" She caught his hand.

"I'm only going to scare him," William assured her; and then the arrow sped. Had he been trying, it is doubtful whether William could have accomplished what now happened. The arrow, aimed at the glossy, fan tail of Abraham, as the bird was called, struck him on the head, a glancing blow. Whereupon the big bird jumped a yard in air, and then began gravely walking around in a circle, his head heavily tilted to one side.

They heard Father come into the barn, cross the threshing floor, and unlatch the little door on their side; but by the time he got it open, the conspirators were out of sight. So, too, was the turkey, which had stumbled down the incline to the little cove, and lain down among the alders there. It was not until they were coming in from the milking that Father espied the suffering bird, gravitating toward the roost

in crazy circles.

"Hello! What's the matter with the gobbler?" Father asked, setting down the brimming pails. William, after a critical examination of the question, decided that it was not really a question at all, but

rather in the nature of an exclamation: therefore, he did not answer. Lizabeth Bess, coming out to tell them supper was ready, observing William shaking his head and scowling behind Father's back, also preserved a discreet silence.

With a further accession of discreetness, she

slipped away, and went back to the house.

"Strange about that gobbler — he was all right at noon," observed Father. "Had you seen him like this before, William?"

"I thought he was acting kind o' queer this after-

noon," replied the veracious William.

"Never saw a fowl act like that before; he seems to be crazy," Father went on. "Well, I don't know what to do for him, only to shut him up in the hospital, and see how he'll be in the morning. It's too bad!"

Unquestionably it was too bad! William thought as, the last thing before going to bed, he lit the lantern and prepared to pay a visit to his victim's cell.

"Oh, go to bed, boy!" urged Mother, appreciating his concern. "You can't do anything for him!" Whereat William again felt mean — "meaner'n pusley!" He was up at the peep of dawn, agreeably to the surprise of Father; and, as the boy followed his parent out for the early milking, some one called his name softly. Turning, he saw a little, night-capped head poked out of an upper window.

"Is — is Aberham dead, Wee-um?" she stagewhispered. Frowning fiercely, William shook his

head, and the night-capped one disappeared.

That no direct question was put to the children goes to show that they were ordinarily a pretty good pair; but this trustfulness only added to their humiliation and remorse. At times, "Aberham" seemed to improve a little. He had sense enough to eat, and sometimes, pausing in his tread-mill round, would stand long in meditation.

The one scrap of silver lining to the cloud was that now Bess could wear her red dress with immunity.

One of the little girl's chief treasures was a kaleid-oscope; when all things else palled she would spend hours gazing into its ever-changing depths. Some weeks after the gobbler's "accident," she took a notion to experiment with her toy: she would hold it down deep in the horse trough, and see what effect the water would have on its colours!

The immediate result was nothing. Disappointed, she stood the glass on the flat stone to dry, when suddenly a woodpecker began tapping somewhere up in the apple tree. It was exceedingly important to learn whether the pecker was a grey head, a black-and-white, a red-head, or the one-with-the-hat. So 'round and 'round the tree walked the little naturalist, peering up until her neck ached.

Triumphantly she located her bird at last: it was none of the kinds mentioned, but a long, slender, blu-

ish-grey specimen, little and lively as a wren.

The sun, which had been hiding, now came brilliantly forth, and Bess decided to look through her glass at the day-star. Surely it would enhance the jewel-like colours! With the air of an old salt, she raised the glass to her eye. But whatever — what-

ever was the matter with it? There were no colours there!

Trembling, she lowered the cylinder and examined it. The water had done its work! It had soaked off the band that held the glass disks in place. The outer one, with the bits of coloured glass heaped upon it, lay there on the flat stone like a little plate of candy.

With a sobbing cry, their owner swooped upon the precious bits that seemed so few, compared with the hundreds that had glinted and gleamed in the reflecting glasses. Some of them must have fallen out, into

the bottom of the trough.

"Maybe Wee-um can fix it if I can find the pieces!" said the child, with a gleam of hope. Down on her knees beside the trough went she, looking like an enormous ladybug, in her dotted, red calico dress; when suddenly the sky fell — right on top of her!

It was not in Elizabeth Bess Bradford to stay crushed to earth, however, and, as she struggled, the sky lifted. As she rose, it rose and stood beside her, extremely red in the face, and with one aggressive wing uplifted, giving forth challenging gutturals in

the well remembered way.

"Aberham!" cried Elizabeth Bess, reckless now, of missing bits of glass. Reckless — nay, glad! — of the feathered whirlwind that followed her to the kitchen door. "Come out everybody, quick!" she shouted. "Come out and see Aberham — he's well!"

CHAPTER XVI

ONE SUNDAY IN NOVEMBER

OW, Father, don't tell him which way to go! Just let the reins lie loose, and see whether he'll go straight down Colony Street, or turn up Centre!" commanded his small daughter. She waited breathless until the old horse turned to the left and started up the street that led to the church—"St. Rose's on the Hill," as the ivy-covered edifice was called.

"See that?" she cried triumphantly. "Now

doesn't Charlie know it's Sunday?"

"He knows it's Sunday, because the chatterbox is along," said William. "That is," he elucidated, "I mean he knows we're going to church 'cause she is."

"Well! Just as if I never came to town 'cept —

Mother, make him stop!"

"Hush! Children should be seen and not heard!" Mother reminded her offspring. "There, William," turning to Father, "is the bell! We're late; I wondered why so few people were going—they're all gone!"

"I didn't hear the first bell — did you?" Father asked so innocently that Bess gave him a quick glance.

"What you winkin' at, Father?" she asked, whereat

Sara burst out laughing.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Mother, a bit peevishly. "No wonder no one is going, half an hour ahead of time. I might have waited and skimmed all my milk, and then been in plenty of time!"

"What's that?" asked Gran, hand at ear. "Ahead of time? Better an hour too early than a

minute too late!"

"It's easy to see where Father gets his punctuality from!" giggled Sara. "I don't care — we can take a nice drive around town. Father, take us to that lovely place where the peacocks are on the lawn, and the gold-fish in the fountain!" And —"Drop me at Mrs. Ford's; I'll walk up to church with her," said Mother.

Elizabeth Bess frowned. . . . Mother must think a lot of Mrs. Ford to give up a nice ride with her own fambly, just to walk to church with her! Looked as if Mother liked Mrs. Ford better'n her own fambly!

She was still weighing the evidence pro and con when, as they approached the church a second time, who should come along with their mother but the Rickards children, Peter and Margie, a pair about the age of William and herself, but who were distinctly persona non grata with her. In fact, she placed Peter in the same category with Charlie Horton.

The Rickards children's father had lived in Green Hills years before, and was in the habit of making semi-occasional visits among his old neighbours, and bringing the youngsters, who certainly made the most of these outings! Margie was not really bad, but Peter was a terror.

During the hour and a half in church, where Bess sat between her parents, and consequently out of touch with William, it seemed as if she could not

withdraw her gaze from the hateful pair.

The music was beautiful! And her poetic soul which thrilled to William's rendition of "The Death of Napoleon," and "Bingen on the Rhine," thrilled now when told how, although the "Birds of the air . . . gather not into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them." At the solemn hush, broken only by the silvery tinkle of a bell, she bowed her head with the rest; and, awed by a mystery but vaguely understood, slipped a cold little hand into Mother's warm one.

The Bradfords, led by Mother, were among the first to leave the church. "The children will have to miss Sunday school to-day, William," she said to Father. "I feel one of my headaches coming on, so let us get home as soon as possible." Which meant, among other things, that her little daughter would escape the pestiferous attentions of the Rickards for that day's session.

Home from church, and dinner over, a beautiful Indian Summer afternoon enticed Elizabeth Bess out of doors with her dolls and toys. In fact, a dolls' tea-party was progressing smoothly on the front porch, when Father, dozing on the dining-room lounge, was startled by cries of, "Come here, somebody! Oh! Somebody come here, quick!" He

met Bess hurrying in, with dolls, dishes and food

dribbling from her caught-up apron.

"Hurry and get the other fings!" she commanded. "Those dretful Rickards child'n are coming, and they'll break 'em all to pieces!!"

"Dear me! I thought you'd broke an arm or

something," grumbled the sleepy Father.

"I wisht I had! Then the doctor'd be here, and he wouldn't let 'em in!"

"You call Sara: they'll behave with her around," and Father started out to meet his old neighbour.

Call Sara, indeed! Sara was up at Hortons', Mother was lying down, Gran ditto; Uncle Jim was in Hartford, and William — oh, where was William? She hadn't seen him since dinner. There was absolutely no one to call!

By the time she had rescued another armful of things, and dumped them in the hall closet, the visitors were at the door. A cool "Hello," was her answer to their vociferous greetings. Peter was twirling something between his hands, which his dismayed hostess saw was her old rag doll, Chloe, left behind in the stress of circumstances.

"Oh, don't do that!" cried the distressed little

mother; "you'll have her arms off! Don't!"

"Huh! She ain't no good!" scoffed Peter. . . . "B'lieve they are loosenin'. What'll you gimme to

stop?"

Rushing into the house, Bess caught up the first toy that offered — her treasured glass ball with the silver dog inside it. "There!" she cried, shoving it into his hand, and catching the old doll to her breast. "Oh, don't I hate you, you bad boy! Oh, if Wee-um was only here!"

"Well, Wee-um ain't here!" jeered the bully, turning the ball around and around in his big hands.

As a matter of record, William was nearer than they imagined; but all unconscious of his sister's need.

For some little time past, William had been labouring under the burden of a duty unfulfilled: an unpleasant duty, but one which would brook no further postponement. So, just as soon as the dining-room was cleared after dinner, William tiptoed to the old secretary, and possessed himself of pen, ink and paper, which he carried under his jacket to the barn. Climbing away up to the scaffold under the rafters, where the sun streamed in through a tiny window, he spread his materials on the boards, and started to write a letter. It began:

"Miss Lois Horton, dear Miss — Do you think it's right for you to forget some one you promised to remember, and to like some one else better? You know how it was with that mister Enock Arden when he come home and found his Anny dident like him any more. You know he went away, and dident come back. And there are peeple that don't want Howell Bradford to go away again when he comes back, so please tell Uncle Jim —"

The writer caught himself up in a panic. Uncle Jim, indeed! What was he thinking of? With his penknife he scratched out the telltale word "Uncle," until nothing remained but a hole in the paper.

Well, now, what was it that he wanted Miss Lois to tell the deleted Uncle? How should he word it? As he bit his reluctant pen, it came to William that

Miss Lois was not the one to address in the matter. How would she feel — a girl — to get such a letter? No, sir! Uncle Jim was the one to tackle, provided he could ever get his courage up high enough. Confusion seized upon William, as he thought how near he had come to making a churlish blunder, and he tore the letter into little bits, and scattered them from the window. Then, with hands clasped beneath his head, he lay back and stared up at the cobwebby rafters until sleep — the deep sleep of youth — overtook him.

His distracted sister longed for him in vain. Seeing the bully digging a hole in the ground with his heel, and still solicitous for the toy that was no longer hers, "You'll scratch the glass—'tisn't a marble," she told him.

"'Tis if I say so," he answered. Margie, who had so far taken no part in the hostilities, now put an arm around her suffering friend.

"Don't you mind him, Bess — he's a bad boy," she whispered. "Let's you and me go to the barn

and play."

"All right," her hostess whispered back. "It's lovely there. Father has drawed all the corn in on the thrashing floor, and Wee-um, my brover, has made wigwams of it, jes' like Indians. He said he would if I'd help him husk."

They tiptoed away, casting fearsome glances behind. A last glance showed them Peter still playing with the marble; so with a mad rush they gained the barn doorway, where Margie paused, open-mouthed. Like wigwams indeed the shocks stood, with buffalo

robes and gay blankets covering them. Skins of several woodchucks and muskrats, and one fine fox pelt were stretched upon the walls of the building, where also hung the children's bows and arrows, and a pair of birch-bark quivers decorated with poke-berry ink. These were for looks. For comfort, William had installed an old-fashioned foot stove — the kind they used to use in sleighs in the bitter winter weather. The stove was cold now, of course, but a little heap of charcoal stood beside it.

Bess glanced apprehensively behind her as they entered, and Margie, interpreting the glance, took hold of the big door with her. "Let's hook it quick, before he comes!" she whispered. "Oh! I'd like to live here forever!"

But the serpent was on their trail, and before they could fasten the door it was wrenched from their hands, and he came crowding in.

"Who fixed this up?" he demanded.

"Wee-um did!" proudly answered William's sister.

"Wee-um's awful smart, ain't he?"

"I didn't say Wee-um — I said Wee-um. And he is smart — smarter'n any boy in Marion!" she said bravely, considering that Marion was the bully's town; but he was too busy looking about to heed her. Now his gaze fell upon the little stove, which she was furtively trying to hide behind her short skirts.

"What ye got there?" he demanded. "What ye tryin' to cover up?" He gave her a shove, and the little stove stood revealed. "Huh!" remarked the

town boy, examining it with sprightly interest.

Drawing a match from his pocket, he started to light the fire, but his unwilling hostess clutched him by the shoulder. Her little face was tense as she told him, "You mustn't light it! You mustn't! Nobody but Father and Wee-um can light that fire. Father said so!"

"G'wan!" answered the bully, scratching the match on the sole of his shoe. "G'wan away!" But Bess was not to be shaken off. Advancing upon him again with scowling brows and set teeth, she said in a terrible voice,

"If you light that fire, Wee-um won't leave a

whole bone in your skin!"

This was the awful threat that William had made the day young Eddie Horton had tried to push her into the pond. It had thrilled her being then as she listened, and it thrilled her even more now as she uttered it.

The bully put an agile foot upon the burning match, as he eyed the child with something like respect. "Aw, who wants to light a baby thing like that?" he queried contemptuously. "I'm goin' up

in the hay."

He climbed the ladder to the hay mow above, and the little girls breathed a dual sigh of glad relief. This was but momentary, however, for from the hay mow presently ferocious growls and blood-curdling cries fell about them. Clasping each other, they gazed upward, to see the boy, with wide, staring eyes, gazing down.

"There's a panther up here!" he yelled. "An ol' big panther, an' he's goin' to jump right down on

ye, if I don't kill him first!" He disappeared in the

hay; and the cries recommenced.

The terror-stricken children made a rush for the door, but Margie, who was first, caught her foot on a cornstalk, and fell, and Bess fell on top of her. Margie thought it was the panther, and lay half fainting, unable to make a sound. Her companion was not much better, but she was making a valiant effort to drag Margie to her feet, when a new note from the top of the mow arrested her.

"You let me alone! I ain't done nothing!" Peter was whining. And then she heard William say, "Now, maybe you'll scare a couple of little girls to death again!" (Whack, whack, whack,) "Maybe you will," (whack, whack, whack). "And then again, maybe you won't!" (Whack, whack, whack, whack!) William had jumped down from the scaffold to the mow, and come upon the bully from the

rear.

The little girls' sobs turned to hysterical laughter as Peter came scrambling down the ladder. Even his sister, whom he habitually bullied, enjoyed his downfall; and whining and muttering, he betook himself to his father's wagon, where he sat and sulked.

It was time, now, for William to go after the cows. Peter malevolently watched him out of sight, when, quick as an elf, he hopped out of the wagon, and into the parlour, where the little girls were playing. The high, old-fashioned mantel, whereon stood some of Bess's treasures, caught his attention and climbing on a chair, he proceeded to examine them.

"Oh, Margie, here's something new!" he ex-

claimed, catching up a little green and yellow duck, that was seated on a box that squeaked when you pressed it. Peter made it squeak until he was tired. Then, taking it in both hands, meanwhile keeping his back to his small hostess, who was dodging around the chair, trying to see what he was up to, he deliberately tore open a corner of the box to see what made the noise.

The men were coming in, so Peter, hastily replacing the duck, jumped down and seated himself with folded hands, while Bess, who knew in her heart that he had been in mischief, stood and glared at him. Peter's father, a big, good-natured man, much given to joking, observing the tableau, said,

"Bessie, now that William's getting so big, you have no little brother to play with. Suppose I leave

Peter here with you - what?"

"Bessie" nearly exploded. She cast an appealing glance at Father, but he was smiling vacuously. However, the little girl had not reached the mature age of "going on six" without having learned some diplomacy. Very sweetly, but very firmly, she answered:

"Oh, no, sir! I'm afraid you'd be lonesome without him!"

CHAPTER XVII

RE-ENTER THE EAVESDROPPER

"Her brown silken dresses — her cheeks like the roses, There was none like my darling Daisy Deane!"

sang Elizabeth Bess Bradford to her dolls.

Pausing in the middle of a line, she meditated:

"Sara, do you s'pose Daisy Deane always wore brown silken dresses?" she asked. "I'd have liked a pink or a blue one sometimes!"

"Guess she did," giggled Sara, who was playing checkers with William. "She probably bought the silk by the bolt — it would come cheaper that way."

"By the bolt? What kind of a bolt?"

"Oh, any kind! Hush up, Bess - how can we

play when you're talking?"

"She's just plaguing you!" William came to the rescue. "A bolt of cloth's a big, long piece. And the song doesn't say her dresses, but her tresses—that means her hair."

"Land o' Goshen! Dresses is hair, and bolts is cloth!" cried the despairing Bess. Knowledge might be power, but the gaining of it was going to be "powerful" hard!

The checker game finished, Sara went to the melodeon, and began to play and sing "Just Before the Battle." Her little sister liked this, all except the lines

"When oh, the dreaded Minié struck me, And I sank amid the fray!"

Now, what was a "Minnie" doing in the war? War was for men! And what kind of a girl was she, anyway — going round and striking the poor sholdiers? And striking them so hard that they "sank amid the fray!" (What was the fray?)

A whistle sounded outside the window, and William got up hastily and went out. Bess knew who it was — that miser'ble old Bunt Horton — coming 'round and whistling for William! — and William was big goose enough to go out to him! What could it be that he wanted, this time o' night? They went around the house together, and she went out to the kitchen, and flattening her nose against the window, saw them go into the woodshed.

Not for a long time had William had occasion to accuse his sister of "snooping round"—her reformation was thought to be complete. But the best

of us lapse at times!

The boys had lit a lantern, and were fussing over something in the shed; and the little girl, tiptoeing down the back steps, made her stealthy way to a point from which, as she thought, she could see and hear without being seen or heard. Charlie, it appeared, was showing William how to make a fishing creel from willow wands, and his tongue was as nimble as his fingers.

"No, I suppose you hain't never seen a Ku-kluck,"

he was saying. "Neither have I, for that matter, unless it was Ku-kluckers that set fire to Irvings' barn last month. And mind ye, some folks says it was." (Here Bunt caught a glimpse of the little huddled figure, and proceeded to lay on the colour.) "Some folks say they seen 'em sneakin' round with torches in their hands, a little while before the fire broke out!"

"Get out!" scoffed William. "The Ku-klux don't go sneakin' 'round; they put on white masks so's you won't know them, and then they come ahootin' and a-hollerin', all on horseback! There

was nothing like that at Irvings' fire!"

"Well, that's what I heard. But even if it wasn't them, they're liable to be here any day; they're comin' farther and farther north all the time. And they're kidnappers too, them Ku-kluckers! just clap a plaster over your mouth so's you can't holler, and then your goose is cooked. My father knew a little girl that was kidnapped: a feller stuck a piece of plaster over her mouth, tucked her under his arm, and they never seen her -"

A shadow darkened the woodshed door. There was a wild scramble and rush as Elizabeth Bess made her way to William, and clutched him with shaking

hands.

"Aw, shut up!" cried William, frowning fiercely at Bunt, and putting an arm about the trembling youngster.

"And they never seen her no more!" finished

Bunt with great satisfaction.

"Shut up, I tell you! Go on home with your darn

lies!" shouted William, as his little sister squirmed up into his arms, and buried her face in his neck.

"All right! Don't believe it if you don't want wait and see, that's all — just you wait!"

"I hope they'll bidger I

"I hope they'll kidnap him, the very first one!" shivered the youngest Bradford, as they hurried into the house, walking sideways to frustrate a possible attack from the rear.

"It would be kind of a good riddance, that's a fact!" agreed William with heartiness!

CHAPTER XVIII

UNCLE JIM TAKES UP THE QUEST

F the editor of the Boston Globe was surprised when he received, by the same mail, two letters from women in a small Connecticut town, asking for information of a man mentioned in the paper months before, the surprise was transitory. It was all in the day's work! Everything is grist that comes to an editor's mill!

He answered his correspondents courteously, and at some length: he could tell them nothing of L'Estrange, as the reporter who "wrote him up" was no longer connected with the Globe, and nothing was known of his whereabouts. He seemed to have "vanished as completely as L'Estrange himself," so far as the editor knew. However, on the assumption that the finding of L'Estrange was of more than ordinary interest to his correspondents, he would have an "Information Wanted" notice inserted in to-morrow's paper and be pleased to forward any information it might elicit. And there the matter rested.

With the increasing frequency of Jim Bradford's visits to the Horton domicile, a slight coolness—so very slight as to be imperceptible to an outsider, but felt distinctly by the two women—had come be-

tween Mother and the Little Quaker Lady. Therefore the matter of writing to the Globe was not mentioned between them. Neither knew that the other had done so. As a matter of fact, Jim's visits were becoming an embarrassment to the girl, who began to cast about for some means of letting him know this, without actually telling him so.

But to Elizabeth Bess Bradford, the present state of affairs was delightful. Now she and Bertha could often stay to supper at each other's homes, as Uncle Jim was always willing to act as convoy and

chaperon for his small niece or her friend.

The picture in the locket was not the only memento Lois possessed of her soldier. There was an odd little ring that he had given her when they were still

in the district school together.

Years before, when Howell was a baby, his proud grandmother had presented him, (passing over the head of his father and uncle), with his grandfather's chain and seal, to be worn when he should be old enough to appreciate them. So Howell had donned the gift with his first "store clothes": that is, the chain proper. The seal, and the section from which it depended, he removed, as being too conspicuous; and besides, he had another use for it.

Even young as they were — little more than children — an understanding already existed between Howell and Lois. They considered themselves bound to each other. In token of this, the boy had made a ring from the unused piece of chain. From some extra links he formed a sort of true-lover's-knot by way of signet; and as the links were of a

peculiarly delicate and elaborate pattern, the result

was a ring not only distinctive, but beautiful.

Lois had never worn it in public since her lover went away, because of some vague, maidenly scruple; but one evening when Jim was expected to escort his small niece home, she took out the ring, and put it on her finger.

Jim espied it at once, and when the others had left them and the two little girls alone in the sitting-room, with the freedom that their comradeship warranted,

he lifted her hand for a nearer view.

"Something new?" he asked, with an entirely spurious lightness, in view of the fact that the ring adorned the second finger of the left hand, which, in the Sixties, was the "engagement" finger.

"Oh, no! I've had it a long time!" Lois an-

swered.

"Kept it pretty effectually concealed, haven't you?"

"I seldom wear it; it's a trifle large, for one

thing."

"It would be an easy matter to remove one of the links."

"Oh! I wouldn't think of doing that!" cried

Lois hastily.

Jim looked at her searchingly. He had forgotten the "little pitcher," industriously sewing dolls' clothing with Bertha. "I infer that you think a good deal of that ring," he remarked.

"Yes, I do," Lois answered tremulously. was nervously fingering a little silver pencil, and the ring glinted in the light with every motion.

denly Jim bent again to examine it, but this time he did not touch her hand.

"Pardon my scrutiny; but there seems to be something familiar about that ring," he said slowly. "I'm sure I've seen it somewhere, and I'm trying to remember where."

"Doubtless you have," said Lois evenly. "It is part of what was an heirloom in your family. Howell gave it to me."

Jim Bradford drew a long breath. "I see!" was

all he said, and then they both fell silent.

At the name "Howell," Bess glanced up quickly from her sewing, and took note of the absorbed faces before the fire. Neither of the grown-ups noticed her, and she bent again to her work, with an ear to windward. After a little, she heard Uncle Jim say,

"After all, he's luckier than most of us. If I thought any one would be loyal to me after four or

five years -"

"It isn't just mere loyalty," Lois interrupted. "You heard what his mother said that evening—that she was still hoping and waiting? Well, so am I."

"Impossible!" Jim burst out. "I never heard of such foolishness!"

"Call it what you like," said Lois coldly.

Again there was a silence, while Jim tried to get himself in hand. He saw that he had cut the ground from under his own feet, and was trying to think how he could redeem his mistake.

"I have made you angry," he said, regarding the

severe set of her features against the background of flame. "But if you will consider my position for a moment - you see I had thought there might be hope for me. And it's rather hard, don't you think? - to fall from the heights of hope to the depths of despair without any warning?"

"I know it is, Jim," she answered softly, with a

swift touch of her hand on his.

"Then be a little bit kind," he pleaded. "Just

put yourself in my place - if you can."

To the listening child, this talk of falling from the heights of hope to the depths of despair, if puzzling, was none the less thrilling. She whispered the words over and over so as to be able to remember them -"Hikes of hope — deps of dispair." It was so provoking to start to ask William the meaning of something, and find she had forgotten what the thing was.

"Hikes of hope, deps of dispair," she was repeating, with elaborate lip motion, when she caught Lois' eye fixed upon her, and blushed guiltily. But the fat was in the fire - Lois turned the back of the big wing chair squarely upon her, and thereafter the two

spoke in an undertone.

It was just like the inconsiderateness of grownups! Well, she hoped they would make their throats sore, grunting like that! When it was so much easier

to speak out, too!

"I think I can put myself in your place, if you will do likewise," Lois answered her suitor. "You have known me such a little while, Jim. You were always away, beginning at college, ever since I was the size of these," she nodded towards the children, "while

Howell and I had been together all that time. At school and at play — he was always doing something for me. I remember I was crazy about plums. There was a tree in Gorham's pasture — sour, crabbed things, it puckers my mouth to think of them — but Howell braved a ferocious bull to get some plums for me, and got himself treed. He was up there till Mr. Gorham went after the cows at night, and drove the bull away." She laughed softly at the remembrance, and Jim knew that she had forgotten his presence. He could have groaned in the soreness of his heart!

"Let me understand just what you mean by 'waiting and hoping,' "said he, phlegmatically judicial. "Does it mean that you are to sacrifice yourself indefinitely to this fetish? That you are to go on wasting your youth, eating out your heart for a crazy notion? For that's what it is, Lois — just a crazy notion. You might better be an East Indian suttee, and get the thing over at once, than to prolong the agony like this!"

"Whether I am wise or foolish," answered Lois, whose face had grown quite white, "time will show. But this fact remains: Until I know, positively, that Howell Bradford is dead, I shall never think

of another man!"

"Then the burden of proof remains with me," said Jim slowly. "Very well, I'll take the challenge. To-morrow I'll start, and I promise you I'll get results, one way or another, before I stop. If my brother's boy is alive, and I can find him, and restore him to his home — and to you — I hope I'm man

enough to do it without whining. If I find proof of the other kind, will it mean - what will it mean

for me, Lois - from you?"

"I can only say — that in that case —" she meditated each word - "I will do my best to give you what you will have deserved - sometime - if you don't get tired waiting. But I can't promise anything. Do, do forget me! You knew nice girls in the South, surely? Why not look up one of them?"

Jim laughed ironically. "Here you are advising me to do what you yourself, in yourself, would consider most disloyal. Hello! Bess has succumbed!" as the little girl's head drooped forward onto the table.

"You are sure, then," he said, taking Lois's hand in his, "that all this isn't a piece of sheer romanti-cism? That your heart and not your imagination is involved?"

"I'm sure," she faltered, the tears rushing to her eyes.

"Good-bye, then," he said, and lifted her hand to

his lips.

Elizabeth Bess opened sleepily smiling eyes as Uncle Jim lifted her in his arms, then snuggled contentedly down with her head on his shoulder, and an arm about his neck. Lois held the door open to light him down the steps with his burden. He turned at the foot, and said "Good-bye again!" and then the darkness hid him.

Jim had said he would go "to-morrow," and tomorrow he went, with few explanations, and after hurried arrangements with a neighbour who wanted to rent his part of the farm for the coming year.

He had been letting himself think, morbidly, as he made his few preparations — that he was only a fifth wheel — that his comings and goings counted for little or nothing to anybody, when the storm of protest that greeted his announced departure quite changed his point of view. His small niece did not seek to hide her grief in the pillow of the spare bed — she voiced it loudly in his arms, leaving the pillow to Sara.

But what touched the still boyish heart of Jim the most was when William, who had driven in with him to the three o'clock train, said good-bye, and he saw the lad's sturdy chin quiver a little as he said it.

Jim rightly interpreted this show of feeling: "It's not I, but what I stand for to him that he's missing, and that's a big brother!" and for the first time he warmed to the task before him. "If Howell should be alive, and have the right stuff in him, his coming home will be the best thing that ever happened to this boy."

His spirits rose as the train swept him on to New York; and hope for himself, whatever the outcome

of his quest, rose with them.

Perhaps the whilom lovers would find, upon meeting, that things were not as they had been before. Meetings after long separations not infrequently proved the death of romance! And then—!

But the "then" and now were far apart.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GOLDEN RULE

HINGS seemed deadly dull after Uncle Jim's going. True, now that the fall work was over, Chinney and Mrs. Chinney dropped in oftener, which was, of course, delightful. And calls with other interesting grown-ups were more fre-

quently exchanged.

Another nice thing happened the first time Miss Lois called after Uncle Jim's departure: slight as had been the misunderstanding between Mother and the Little Quaker Lady, Bess's keen eyes had discovered it. Now to her surprise, Mother took Lois' hand—the one with the ring—in hers, and then they put their arms around each other, and kissed affectionately. Whereupon Lois decided definitely that that ring had been laid away too long. It was in its rightful place now, and there it should stay.

One thing that rankled in the child's bosom, was the fact that Bertha — Bertha, who was three whole weeks younger than she was, had begun going to school! Not that Bertha wanted to go to school! She loathed the very thought of it; and sobbed out her grief and rebellion upon the heaving bosom of her friend, who would have been charmed had the

opportunity been given to her. But Miss Lois was impressed with the wisdom of catching your pupil young. Besides, a man teacher, and a "college student" at that, had been engaged to teach the young idea that winter, and Lois wanted Bertha to reap the benefit accruing from this opportunity.

But Bess "was subject to colds!" She had heard Mother and Mrs. Cone talking it over, and agreeing that it would be the part of wisdom to keep her at home until spring. And although she went out into the kitchen and stamped and kicked and gritted her teeth, the wisdom of this decision was already apparent, for here with the very first snow, she had a bad cold, and a "most distressing cough," Mother said.

And by the same token, there was now, out in the kitchen on the back of the stove, a dish containing onion syrup. It was a pretty dish, and covered over with a pretty, Japanese saucer; so that you might have thought there was something nice in it — some dainty being kept warm for somebody, if its sicken-

ing smell did not betray it!

The imprisoned child took her slate and pencil and went out into the kitchen, where the winter sun shone brightest. The room was deserted. She glanced at the stove, tilted her head toward the door, and listened. If she were only sure that nobody would come while she was doing it, she would carry the dish to the sink, and empty it out. But she would probably burn herself!

If it were not such a pretty dish — too pretty to be put to such base uses! — she could push it off onto

the floor and smash it, and let them think Nero had whipped it off with his flail of a tail, as had happened once or twice before.

The pantry door opened so suddenly as to make the little schemer jump. "Where have you been, dear?" asked Mother. "I was calling you to take your syrup. My! It's all drying up here on the stove. Hand me that teaspoon."

"I wish it would dry up — every single, last drop of it!" said her little daughter fiercely. "Nasty old

stuff!"

"The idea! Don't you want your cold to get

well, so that you can go outdoors again?"

"I want my cold to get well with castaroil. I don't mind castaroil a bit." She peered into the cup as Mother dipped in the spoon. "So you thought that stuff was all dryin' up, did you?" she asked with sarcasm. "Why, all that would never dry up in the wide world!"

"Aw, you dry up!" drawled William from the doorway. "You've got altogether too much lip, for one of your size!" Then he fled, laughing. His sister would have followed to administer punishment for this addition of insult to injury; but Mother placed a firm hand on her shoulder, and presented the brimming spoon.

"Now run and get your basket of pieces, and Grandmother 'll show you how to make that new block for your quilt," said she. "I must take William to town to get an overcoat, but Sara 'll be home

from school before long."

William was going to get a new overcoat, was he?

"And what do I get?" she asked with drooping mouth.

"Well, if you're a good girl, I'll bring you some

popcorn balls."

A twinkle came into the child's eyes, and she turned aside to hide a snicker. Didn't make any difference whether she was a good girl or not; Mother never came home without popcorn balls, or something. And was it supposable that she would do so now, when her daughter had a bad cold, and a most distressing cough? No indeed it wasn't!

She watched the sleigh out of sight down the hill, then brought her little rocking chair and basket of pieces into Gran's room, where the two settled themselves for a cosy afternoon. They might have been two old ladies, or two tiny girls, so harmoniously did they work together — so perfectly did their rockers

keep time.

When the clock struck three — the big, booming kitchen clock that successfully assailed even Gran's dulled ear drums, she said, "It's time to take your medicine now, dearie — run along, like a good girl!"

Her granddaughter eyed her reproachfully. "I did hope that you would forget about that old onion syrup, Gran," said she. "I would 've, if 'twas you

had to take it!"

Gran's deafness was suddenly worse. "Oh, no, don't take more than one spoonful!" she admonished. "That's a plenty! And then you'll find a seed-cake on the pantry shelf."

With lagging step, the victim started down stairs,

but stopped at the landing to look out of the window.

Who was that coming down the road, away off up there by Hortons'? Well! If it wasn't Bertha, and coming as fast as her fat legs could carry her! She must have stayed home from school — and could it be that she was coming down to spend the afternoon? It must be!

The child rushed down to the door, where the two met in a fervent embrace. "I'm awful glad to see you, Burfa!" the hostess cried. "Come on upstairs, and Gran'll give you some patchwork to do. Me and her's having the lovliest time!"

"Oh, Lizbuf, I can't!" cried Bertha, on the verge of tears. "Is your muvver at home, Lizbuf?" Bertha, who lisped at all times, lisped worse under

the stress of excitement.

"No; there isn't a livin' soul home but just me and Gran and Nero. What'd you want her for, Burfa?"

"Oh, my brover - my big brover Charlie -'s sick wif a bad cold. My mama says he's all choked up like the crook, and she wants some of what your muvver gives for colds and crooks - quick!"

A great thought — two great thoughts — thrilled Lizbuf at this plea. Her mother had recently been reproving some little leanings toward revenge in her younger daughter. "We must do good, instead of bad, to the people we don't like," she had told her, in explanation of the Golden Rule.

Here then, was her opportunity to do good to some one she didn't like! "I've got just the very thing, Burfa,—if 'tisn't all dried up!" She snatched the cover off the onion syrup. Dried up, indeed! Mother had added more water, and the dish was more than half full! Bess shuddered at the narrowness of her escape!

With a firm hand, she poured the golden syrup into the tiny stone jug Bertha had brought, and jammed in the cork. "I'm giving it all to you to take to Charlie, Burfa," she said largely; "every single bit. And mind you don't spill a drop of it!"

"I won't, Lizbuf, and I fink you're just the bestest girl!" was Bertha's encomium, as she departed.

The unearned seed-cake forgotten, Elizabeth Bess rushed to the landing, from where she watched the convoy of the onion syrup, up the winding road. When, without slip or stumble, the pudgy Bertha disappeared within her own door, the little one sat down on the stairs, and hugged herself in glee.

"There's gallons and quarts of it!" she chortled.

"Pints and gallons and quarts!"

"Where are you, dearie - why don't you come?" quavered Gran's voice above.

"I'm all right, Gran — I'm a-comin'!" she called

back.

As they resumed their sewing, Gran, who was not deaf (or only slightly so) to her favourite's voice, noticed that she was singing her favourite hymn -"I Want to be A Nangel!" And looking into the innocent, uplifted face of her grandchild, the quick moisture of old age clouded her eyes.

"Bless her little heart!" said Gran to herself,

"All she lacks of it this minute, is the wings!"

CHAPTER XX

"Cum Grano Salis!"

N the floor of the South barn, close under the square window, stood the big sleigh with the bulging, wing sides, and the swans on the curved dashboard — when it was not in use. And here the children loved to linger, when there was nothing in particular for them to do. This was in the second story, over the basement stables; and from the square window one could, like the Ladye in one of Gran's old songs, "Look forth o'er dale and down." That is to say, out over the barnyard, where its grassy slopes dipped to the brook; to the pond, below, and the woods on the farther side.

Here it was that the shy William came to practice his "pieces" for school declamation, with his small sister for indulgent audience. And it is safe to say that no scene from grand opera — no tragedy portrayed in later years by a Booth or an Irving, ever thrilled that audience as did William's rendition of "Horatius at the Bridge," "Rienzi's Address," "Bingen on the Rhine"—or, most delightful of all

to the little woods lover, "Hiawatha."

Upon one occasion, after she had listened, rapt, while William told how the Little Hiawatha

"Learned of every bird its language, Learned their names and all their secrets —

Talked with them whene'er he met them, Called them 'Hiawatha's Chickens'"—

Bess, when William had gone away, thought she would try it herself. She stood with her back to the barn door, and he, who was near and heard her talking softly, approached and treacherously listened, and also shamelessly peeked!

"First — Bow!" said Elizabeth Bess Bradford, and bowed, deeply. Then she cleared her throat sonorously, as he always did before beginning; thrust her hands deep in her little coat pockets, cleared her

throat again, and began —

"Then the little Higher Walker -"

Whereat the listener stuffed his tippet into his mouth, and stole away.

Bess was crazy to catch birds for pets. She had read about people making little "cribs" of willow wands, and placing bait inside to decoy the songsters; and one day Father found her with a sieve uptilted and a string attached — the other end of the string in his daughter's hand where she sat in the back kitchen doorway, waiting for an unwary chickadee.

- "Child, that's no way to catch birds!" he admonished her.
 - "What is the way, then?" she demanded.
 - "When you want to catch a bird just have some

salt with you, and put the least little pinch on its tail. Then you can catch it, without any difficulty," Father assured her.

After that, Bess seldom went abroad without a tiny bag of salt in her pocket. But the trouble then was she couldn't get near enough to put the salt on the birds' tails!

However, upon one memorable day, she was in the barn, amusing herself by writing in the hay dust on the floor when a little shadow darkened the "cat hole" in the door, (every farmer had a cat hole in the bottom of his barn door), near where she was sitting, and a grey-and-white snowbird hopped in! In her ecstatic delight, she sat so rigid that the bird took her for a part of the "scenery," and came within reach of her hand. But alack and alas! The little bag of salt was in the house, so of what avail was this propinquity? Bess could have cried out in her disappointment but for fear of scaring the bird away. Back and forth hopped the visitor, cocking its head to discover the seeds in the dust, and even scratching for them like a chicken but with an inconceivable lightness and grace.

This last was so funny that the spectator could not repress a giggle; whereupon the bird took fright,

and was gone.

The child told the "fambly" about it at the dinner table. "Well, why didn't you catch it, when it was so near?" asked Sara.

"Catch it! How could I catch it when I didn't have my salt along?" her small sister demanded. Father nearly choked over "a piece of meat that

went the wrong way," he said, but he was wiping the tears from his eyes when he returned to the table. All the others were smiling, and the youngest Bradford swept them with an indignant glance.

"I don't see anything to laugh at when Father gets choked!" she said scathingly; at which another piece came very near "going the wrong way."

"Well, I'll have my salt along next time!" declared Bess. "And you'd better get the old bird cage down out of the garret, Mother — you'd better get it down to-day!"

"It'll be ready when you bring in the bird," Mother replied with surprising calmness, consider-

ing the imminence of the event.

"I'll bet it won't! I know you, Mother Bradford. You'll be saying—'Oh, here comes Bess with a bird, and I haven't got the cage down yet!'"

CHAPTER XXI

WHAT HAPPENED IN PHILADELPHIA

FORTNIGHT had passed since Jim Bradford started on what, from the first, he had felt to be a wild goose chase. He had travelled a good bit in those two weeks, and since he could not afford to give his time and money exclusively to the search, he had followed the lead of the elusive "L'Estrange," and become an agent for the sale of vehicles, territory unlimited. Competition was less keen in those days, and salesmen were not, as a rule, restricted to certain territories.

In the middle of December, therefore, Jim found himself in Philadelphia. One of his first acts, upon entering a city was to search the directory for Bradfords and L'Estranges, and this he did now. The Bradfords were easily disposed of, since so far he had found no "Howell" among them; the L'Estranges constituted a harder and more delicate proposition, since he had no given name to guide

him, and tact and diplomacy were required.

Fortunately, so far, the L'Estranges had been few; but here was a goodly list of them, and Jim groaned in spirit as he thought of what was before him.

It was his second day in the city, and he was making a double canvass - of carriage warehouses, and of places where sundry L'Estranges were employed, when he found himself in a dingy street near the river front, where excavating for some new buildings was going on. Busy with his thoughts, Jim failed to notice that he had the street practically to himself, until he was recalled by some one calling excitedly, and hurrying footsteps behind him.

Turning, he faced a slim young fellow half a square away, and found that he was calling to him. Notwithstanding the fact that Jim considered his quest a bootless one, he was always prepared for what might happen; so now he took in at a sweeping glance the personality of his follower. He was lithe and well built, handsome and well dressed, and there was something about the thrust of his chin that made Jim think of his grandfather Bradford.

Not for a moment, though, did Jim think it might be Howell who was shouting at him. Howell always appeared before his mind's eye as rather unkempt and poorly dressed; a slouching figure searching furtively, Wandering-Jewlike, for what always

evaded him.

Suddenly he began to understand that the man

was warning him:

"Come back! - they're blasting! Don't you see the street's closed?" he called, pointing ahead to a barrier with a big sign to that effect upon it. Jim saw it then, and also the pile of timbers chained together to check the flying débris, and turned to run. But he was too late. There was a rumble and a roar, the chained timbers tilted up on end as if they had been a bundle of matches, and, falling over, carried Jim down with them. The cloud of dirt and gravel which peppered the stranger, fifty feet away, would have ended Jim's career then and there had he got the full force of it; but the mass of it went over his head. As it was, nobody would have recognised the cut and bleeding face as belonging to the brisk pedestrian of a moment before!

In a twinkling a crowd had gathered, coming as if up out of the ground. A policeman sent in an ambulance call, and he and the stranger stood guard over the unconscious man until the wagon arrived. The officer searched Jim's pockets for something by which to identify him, but there was nothing except an old envelope with some figures on the back and

a memorandum book.

The young man whose efforts to save him had failed was much affected by poor Jim's predicament. Sitting down on the curb, he took his head in his lap, and tried to staunch the blood with his handkerchief, and to dislodge some of the sand and dirt from beneath the swollen eyelids. Upon the arrival of the ambulance, he got in with the doctor, and rode to the hospital.

"Friend of yours?" queried the doctor, noticing

his companion's perturbation.

"No; I don't know that I ever saw him before. And yet there was certainly something familiar about his face when he turned and looked at me, in the instant before he fell. But it has happened so many times — so many times, now," he said to him-

self, forgetful of the presence of the doctor, who

turned and looked at him sharply.

"Well, anyway, give me your name; we like to have the name of some one when a patient enters: some friend, you know. And you've shown yourself that."

"You may have it for what it's worth, and that's nothing," the stranger replied cryptically. "L'Estrange is the name." The clock in the hospital tower boomed out the first of eleven strokes, and L'Estrange hastily took out his watch, and compared the time with it. "I must be going!" he exclaimed. "I must get that 11:37 train for New York."

"Going to take in the re-union there? I imagine you were a soldier," the doctor hazarded.

"Yes, I was a soldier; and I'm going to the reunion. But I hate to leave this poor fellow here alone."

"Oh, he'll be taken care of," the doctor promised. "He won't get a thirty-dollar-a-week room, but he'll get just as good treatment as if he were a millionaire. Don't you worry! Good-bye!" The door of the elevator cage clanged shut; doctor and patient rose out of sight, and L'Estrange, with a heavy sigh, took his way toward the station.

Jim's period of unconsciousness was mercifully prolonged. The surgeons at first feared a fracture of the skull, but although this proved groundless, the concussion was severe. The principal injury was to his eyes, which were filled with dirt and sand; and the inflammation and pain in the abrased sur-

faces, even after the sand was removed, was almost maddening.

Upon removing his clothing, a purse and a letter or two were found in a "blind" pocket. But Jim, upon recovering consciousness, refused to allow the attendants to write to his family—"they all had troubles enough of their own," he said. However, the superintendent, keeping his own counsel, enclosed a letter addressed to "Miss Lois Horton, Green Hills, Conn.," in one of his own, explaining the situation, and sent them North in the first mail.

Needless to say that the Little Quaker Lady's heart was filled with sorrow and consternation on receipt of the news. She immediately determined to go to Jim, without saying anything to anybody except her mother. He had, presumably, been hurt in her service; and it was for her to do for him anything that could be done. If she found, upon reaching him, that he needed his brother, very well; she would send for him. If not, she would look after Jim herself.

So Lois packed her satchel and started for Philadelphia, which seemed a long, long way from the little Connecticut village among the hills.

When shortly after noon the hospital was reached, an immaculate nurse dressed all in white—a splendid, stately creature, who filled the Little Quaker Lady with awe but warmed her with kindliness as well, led Lois to Jim's cot. His eyes were still bandaged, but he was entirely conscious, and at the sound of her sweet voice, the memory of his pains dropped from him.

"My, my! but it's good to see you, dear, or to hear you, rather," he said, holding her hand in both of his. And the splendid young nurse smiled to herself — a cryptic smile — and left them alone together, for a little while. Later, as his strength returned, Jim told Lois the brief story of the accident, and about the stalwart youth with the Bradford chin who had tried to warn him.

The ambulance surgeon, who had taken an interest in Jim because of his patience and grit, came in as he was telling it. "I believe I didn't mention that he came to the hospital with you, did I?" he asked. "Yes; he was holding your head, and trying to wipe the blood off it when I got to you. He seemed greatly disappointed when on our first search we could find nothing to identify you by. Said he was sure he had seen you somewhere, but couldn't place you."

Lois' face had grown very white. "You didn't

learn his name?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes, I did. He gave it to me, as a matter of form, merely—as being the only friend within reach." The doctor drew a notebook from his pocket, and began turning the leaves. "He hated to leave you alone, but was on his way to the big soldiers' convention in New York; and I assured him we'd take the same care of you as if you were a millionaire!" he said laughing. "Here is the name—L'Estrange."

"L'Estrange!" cried Jim in a shaken voice. While Lois looked so much like fainting that the astonished and puzzled doctor rang sharply for a nurse. "I seem to have blundered upon a mystery," he remarked.

"You have," Jim answered, while Lois made a desperate effort to get herself in hand before the

nurse came.

Not feeling equal to taking up the matter with Jim just then she got away as soon as possible, and walked square after square of the wind-swept streets, heedless of where she was going. Hope had risen high in the heart of the Little Quaker Lady. Surely this stranger must have been her lover! The fact of his being alive seemed to her established. This being so, there must — there should be some way of reaching him! Jim had asked the doctor if L'Estrange had given his address, and he said "No." But there were other ways! The world was not so large, since these two had actually met!

Why, it might be that he was here in Philadelphia

now! She might meet him!

Like a cloud obscuring the sun came to Lois' mind the thought of Evangeline's quest for her lover. How near they had come to each other, yet, "like ships that pass in the night," they had drifted apart,

to meet no more until life was ending!

So sudden and sharp was the reaction, that Lois, who was crossing a little park, sat down on a bench to think the thing out. A bill-poster was at work just opposite and, as she unconsciously followed his movements, the most extraordinary thing happened: the man slapped a sheet against the board and, with

a few deft sweeps of his brush, stuck it fast, and stooped for another. And there, unfolded before Lois's unbelieving eyes, stood out the name —

HOWELL BRADFORD

The Little Quaker Lady was sure she was dreaming; it was all a dream — L'Estrange, and Jim, and the hospital: she would wake up in a minute in her little bed at home. But still her fascinated eyes

followed the movements of the bill-poster.

"Impersonator," was the word that followed, in type a shade less aggressive. Then was added the information that, on the Thursday evening following, at the Girard Theatre, the public would have the opportunity of seeing the famous Impersonator for the last time before he sailed for Europe. Mr. Bradford's delightful readings would be given in costume, and the Treat of the Year was assured to all who would attend.

A distant whistle blew for noon, and the bell in a nearby belfry, booming out the Angelus, brought Lois to her feet. It was not a nightmare, then, but only a bit of truth that is stranger than fiction!

Thursday evening found the girl in an orchestra seat of the Girard Theatre. She had come early, expecting the entertainment to begin on time; to her surprise, the house was nearly empty, but as the minutes passed, it began to fill up, until most of the seats were taken, and still Howell Bradford did not appear. So unbearable was the suspense becoming that Lois felt she must jump up and scream. She

could see herself, the quiet, self-contained Lois Horton, dashing shrieking from the place, and she gripped the sides of her chair until her knuckles snapped.

And then he came: an old man, bent and grey and tottering, yet demanding what the letter of the law

allowed him - his pound of flesh.

"Wouldn't you think he was an old man?" whispered some one near her. "Now wait till you see him take the part of a schoolboy in Knickerbockers,

speaking a piece!"

Lois saw it through, but was no wiser at the end than at the beginning. His own mother would not have known the man! But she would find out! She would not allow any false modesty to stand in the way of her settling this vital question!

Waiting till the house was about emptied, Lois made her way to a little door at the side of the stage, climbed the steps and knocked. The impersonator was washing the last "make-up" from his

face, and came to the door, towel in hand.

"What can I do for you, Madam?" he asked courteously enough, but with a side glance at the

watch lying open on the table.

"Nothing, thank you, sir," Lois answered, drawing back, after a single glance at the middle-aged man before her. "I — you — your name is the same as that of a friend of mine who is missing. And I thought, possibly —"

"I see!" he said sympathetically. "I am indeed sorry to have missed the pleasure of being your friend. You say he was Howell Bradford too?

Strange! If it were John Smith, now — You are

sure there is nothing I can do for you?"

"Quite sure," Lois faltered as she made her way out through the dim passage, and then the deserted theatre.

She would not allow herself to hope again, never

again! It was too harrowing!

For what chance was there that this L'Estrange was Howell Bradford? One in ten thousand, maybe. Jim thought he had the "Bradford chin." There were only about a dozen kinds of chins, one to every fifty millions of people, say! And he had been sorry for Jim, and interested in him? Anybody with a heart would have been! And he "felt sure he had seen him somewhere?" Every day, in a big city, we see some one of whom we think this. Lastly, his name was L'Estrange — and he was a soldier. Well, there were millions of soldiers, more or less, and probably scores of L'Estranges among them!

Thus she pulled to pieces the pleasing hypothesis she had been building up. For the first time in her

gentle life, Lois was bitter!

On going to the hospital the next morning, she was surprised to find Jim's bandages removed, dark glasses having been substituted for them, and the patient sitting up in bed, chatting with the magnificent nurse. Lois despised herself for caring, but this added to her vexation. She had expressed a wish to be present when Jim's eyes would be uncovered, and thought they might have waited for her!

"Lois Horton, cities are not good for you," she

told herself judicially. "Get home to your good mother as soon as you can, and learn patience from her!"

Of course Lois had written to the Bradfords at the beginning; and now that Jim was getting better his family insisted that he should come home for a long stay, until he was strong again. So one bright day, just before Christmas, Lois and he said goodbye to the hospital — including the splendid nurse — and took a train for the north.

In spite of his weakness Jim was happier than he had been since the night Lois showed him the ring that had started him on the quest for his rival. Some intuition told him that Lois had definitely abandoned her expectation of Howell's return; and this being so, time would bring about his own happiness, he felt assured.

Mother had a tempting supper ready for the travellers; the big, "company" tablecloth was spread in their honour, (Bess loved that tablecloth, with its flower clusters tied with true lovers' knots), and Miss Lois stayed to share the meal with them.

She had gone home now, and Uncle Jim, being very tired, had gone to bed. "The child'en," as their little sister always spoke, collectively, of Sara and William, had made the heaviness of Miss Lois's impedimenta an excuse for accompanying her home; Gran was visiting Aunt Eunice in town, and Elizabeth Bess had disappeared, so Father and Mother, sitting at either end of the table, relaxed after a strenuous day, and discussed the situation.

"Well," said Father at length, pushing back his

chair, "it begins to look as if things were coming to a focus, now that Romance has had its toll. Jim goes out like a knight of old at the behest of his Ladye fair, and, having fallen by the wayside, the Ladye herself flies to his rescue."

Mother's brows wrinkled in a frown. "Don't

be silly, William," she admonished.

"Who's silly? I'm simply logical! Having satisfied Romance, I think our young people will come down to earth, forget the past, and live happy ever

after. Doesn't it look that way to you?"

"Who will?" demanded an imperious voice that made them both jump. "Who'll forget and live happy?" asked the small daughter, putting her head out from under the tablecloth. She had been playing house delightfully, in the shelter of its enveloping folds, and her conscience was perfectly clear, since she was not an intentional eavesdropper. Emerging now, with a doll in each arm, she said aggressively:

"I know who you mean! You mean Miss Lois, and that she'll forget Howell, like Uncle Jim asked her to, the night before he went away. Well, she won't. I'd like to know how she could forget him, when she has his picture, and his ring! And she'll never be happy until Howell comes back — I know

she won't!"

"Hi-ty, ti-ty!" said Father, upon recovering his breath. "Time you were in bed, young lady, instead of standing there talking of what you know nothing about!" "I do, too, know!" Bess answered, the indignant tears rising as she stalked away. But Mother reached out as she was passing, and caught her up close and kissed her before carrying her off to bed.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE

VEN with the war two or three years behind them, the atmosphere of sadness and gloom created by the great conflict still hung low over the people of New England. This in common with the rest of the country, of course; but perhaps more noticeably in New England, where the people had not yet fared so far from their Puritan forbears as to have discarded that grave seriousness that clothed them palpably.

Therefore when Mark Dillon, the new "man" teacher, (the first of his kind in Green Hills), suggested the holding of a Christmas-tree festival in the school, the innovation was viewed with disfavour by many. Up to that time, the hanging up of stockings on Christmas Eve, had been the utmost concession to youthful sentimentality. There still remained a very few to whom any celebration of Christmas savoured of "Popery," and was therefore unthinkable.

This, however, was not the young teacher's first innovation — he had taken up the matter of a Soldiers' Monument some time previously, and was triumphantly carrying it through, and the majority of

the parents therefore favoured the Christmas-tree

plan, and promised co-operation.

Green Hills was proud of its first man teacher, for Mark Dillon was one of its own boys who was "making good," as we say to-day. As a mere boy he had run away to the war where he won promotion and honour. Then, when mustered out, he had entered college, and was working his way through, chiefly by teaching in the district schools.

Dillon's course was in marked contrast to that of many men who, untrained schoolboys when they enlisted, came back to civil life to find themselves utterly unfitted for it - or rather, for anything above the manual labour that it had to offer them. Of this unhappy contingent, many were physically unable to work; others strongly disinclined toward it. And from these last was recruited a little army of stay-at-home ne'er-do-wells; and another of "trampers," their distinguishing badge the old blue, Army overcoat! These unfortunates, victims of circumstance, were but the flotsam of that army that came home to build up a surpassing nation.

The few returned soldiers that she knew and these blue-coated wanderers formed the only tangible links between Lizabeth Bess and the war. She had vague memories of wartime talks, some thrilling, some only puzzling. One of her earliest recollections was that Lincoln was "calling for troops." And she immediately pictured the President standing atop of a high hill, "calling" himself breath-

less!

Another puzzling phrase was, "mustered out."

The only "mustard" she knew anything about was the kind Mother used to make plasters of. She had one applied to her little chest once, and could imagine the soldiers experiencing great joy when their "mustard" was "out!"

We must go back to the Christmas Tree.

The whole Bradford family, excepting Gran, and Uncle Jim, who was still in the invalid class, were there, as well as all the rest of the town. The youthful imaginings regarding the tree itself had been vivid, but when the immense curtain was drawn back, the long-drawn "Ah-h-h!" that went eddying around the room told of dreams fulfilled!

When Santa Claus came in, in his time-honoured, fur-trimmed suit, his red cheeks and white whiskers, silence fell upon Bess. A few nights before she had heard his reindeers' tread upon the roof;

but here he was, before her very eyes!

No less than six times did "Miss Elizabeth Bradford" hear her name called, and promptly answer; never dreaming, as she smiled her thanks into the old gentleman's twinkling eyes, that those orbs be-

longed to Chinney!

The good fortune of Sara and William also gave cause for rejoicing; nor did the little one murmur when the big sister's gifts outnumbered her own. One of them was so lovely that all the other girls came crowding around to examine it. It was a workbox, all made of glass, and bound around with gilt paper beading. Inside the cover, which itself

was a shallow glass box, reposed a full-flown rose

among its green leaves.

Bess fell to wondering how that rose ever got into that box. There was no way in which it could have got in — there was no way in which it could ever get out! She could see it resting there through so many years that it made her dizzy to think of them!

Holding the box in her lap, Sara examined it happily. A little tray with sewing paraphernalia filled the upper half; the lower part was empty, save

for a folded bit of paper with writing on it.

"What does that say?" queried the small sister, reaching for it. But Sara pounced upon it like a hawk upon a sparrow and, after a hasty glance, thrust it in her pocket. Blushing rosily, she lifted smiling eyes to meet another pair of eyes smiling at her from across the room. Lizabeth Bess observed the signaling.

"What's Lester Bond laughing at you for,

Sara?" she asked jealously.

"And what makes your face so awful red?"

"Hush, hush!" Mother whispered, shaking her.

"Well, it is awful red, Mother!" she persisted.

"And oh-h-h! Just look at Lester Bond's!"

The overflow of the Horton family—all that would not fit in their big sleigh—had walked the mile and a half to the celebration, but it was another matter to walk home, when the festivities were at an end.

By "doubling up," room was made in the Bradford sleigh for Miss Lois and Sally. The former took Bess on her lap, and, since in the excitement of getting the presents together, the child had lost her mittens, the Little Quaker Lady gave her her muff to hold; tucking her own little bare hands under the buffalo robe.

Something hard was in the muff — hard, and elusive; it kept slipping between the investigator's fingers. But they captured it at length, when it proved to be — of all things! — Miss Lois's little chain ring. This romantic piece of jewelry the finder slipped upon her finger, revelling in its fictitious ownership, until the combination of frosty air and jingling sleigh-bells made her forget the ring, and everything else.

The Bradfords left their neighbours at their own door; Lois, without having missed her ring, possessed herself of her muff and said good-night. Just then the moon came up, clear and cloudless, to the delight of William and Sara. "Goody! there'll be moonlight in the morning!" they ex-

claimed.

It was the Bradford custom to drive into town for the before-daylight services on Christmas morning, and moonlight for the drive was an important factor.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TRAGEDY OF THE KNIFE

HEN Elizabeth Bess Bradford was five, one of her father's sisters married a middle-aged widower with an only child — a delicate little daughter of nine or ten. The two children, little Janey Welsh and Bess, found themselves congenial spirits from the first; and the latter esteemed it a great favour to be invited to her aunt's house in town, the splendours of which were a continual feast to her eyes.

Then, the toys of Janey! And the clothes! While out in the wood-shed might still be seen her old baby carriage, which of itself proclaimed her the aristocrat! Bess's car of state had been William's little wagon with the squat, iron wheels; her pranc-

ing charger, the faithful William himself.

When, after one brief season together, the little Janey relaxed her frail hold upon life and lay quietly dying on the big, hair-cloth sofa in the parlour, it was her joy to have Bess come and stay with her. For hours together the child would sit beside her friend, swinging the peacock feather fan or reading the stories in "Wilson's Second Reader," which she could do almost as well as Janey herself; or play-

ing with the two dolls and making up little stories

about them, which she would tell to Janey.

Elizabeth Bess had never been able to make up her mind which of Janey's two dolls she liked best: the big doll, which boasted the great height of fifteen inches, but was handicapped by cloth feet and hands, or the little doll, which stood a bare ten inches in her dainty, blue china shoes, and had pretty hands and arms of white china, as well.

But she never had to choose between them. One day Mother came home from Aunt Eunice's, and told her, very gently, that Janey had gone away to Heaven. Opening her purse, Mother took from it

a little carnelian ring.

"She took this off her finger herself, and sent it to you, darling. She said she wanted you to have it to-day. And she sent you her dolls, too. She said, 'I want Bess to have them, for I know she'll take good care of them.'" Whereat the legatee went hastily into the spare chamber, and shut the door behind her.

A week or two later, came a pathetic bundle of the other pretty things that had been Janey's dainty dresses, wonderful hats, and wraps of silk and velvet.

There were no germs or microbes in the Sixties! So, without a qualm, Mother proceeded to "make over" the things for her girlie. A pair of rubber boots could not be made over, but would have to be grown to; so these were, of course, the things Bess was most eager to wear.

After Janey's death, Aunt Eunice, who had loved

the little girl as if she had been her own, was very lonely — to say nothing of poor Uncle Dan'l, the father; so she availed herself of every opportunity of having Elizabeth Bess spend a day with her. Shortly after Christmas came the birthday of that young lady — and a few days before came an invitation to spend it in town with Aunt Eunice.

Now, with Janey away, a visit to the big house was not the unmixed pleasure it used to be. Some times Aunt Eunice was the most delightful of hostesses: sometimes she was exacting, not to say stern, and the question of which mood one would find her in was not without elements of excitement for the

prospective visitor.

Not only was Aunt Eunice herself contradictory—so was her house, and all about it. Life therein was made up of joys, sorrows, and creepy mysteries. For example: not even Mother, who was, of course, the smartest, as well as the best woman in the world, could make such cookies as Aunt Eunice could; and there were always some of them on hand, as well as a dish of fruit upon the little serving table in the dining room, from which the child could help herself.

The very entrance to the place — the "Postern Gate," as Bess always thought of it — was itself a fairy bower, arched over with climbing rose vines, while in the corner of the yard, between the cherry trees, was a strawberry bed.

Think of it! Strawberry shortcake on demand, as it were! Whereas, when the Bradford family pined for short-cake, Bess was constrained to take

her little wicker basket and scour the seven hills of

the Round Hill pasture lot!

In the middle of the yard stood the well. Like the Postern Gate, she always thought of it in capitals, but in big, black, fearsome capitals. For this was not a frank, open-faced well, with a willing and generous bucket, like the one at home. No, this was a mysterious, hooded thing, all covered in except the end of its spout. And would you believe that there wasn't a vestige of a bucket? Nothing but a chain that had no end! You just turned and turned the handle, (the Wee One didn't), and after a while the water began to gurgle sluggishly from the spout!

There was another well in the cellar: a stealthy thing—a hole in the floor that lay in wait for you, and might catch you if you did not hold tight to Aunt Eunice's hand when she went to set the milk and butter on the board that covered it over.

Last of all was the brook at the bottom of the garden. A poor, shackled thing, confined between brick walls. Only once, in freshet time had it come into its own, rising above its imprisoning barriers, picking up the empty chicken coops and ash barrels and carrying them away on its crest, Elizabeth Bess exulting in its freedom.

From the high, back stoop could be seen, just across the railroad, the "Old Gong." Morning, noon and night it boomed out its thunderous message and Bess felt a proud, proprietary interest in it.

Another thing that atoned for the capriciousness of Aunt Eunice's mood was the fact that Cousin

Marcia Milward also lived in town, and had staying with her a niece a little older than Bess, and a nephew a little younger. When the storm signals were set over Aunt Eunice's domicile her small relative would betake herself to Cousin Marcia's. She was sure, if not always of a good time, at least of excitement where Dicky and Ruth were.

But on this sixth birthday, Aunt Eunice was graciously kind, presenting, so to speak, the freedom of the cooky jar to her little visitor. A hair ribbon, and two little aprons of "sprigged" calico lay on her plate at the table; and Father on leaving for home, had given her a bright, silver quarter, "to

spend as you please," he told her.

To spend as she pleased! Ah! That was royal giving. She stood on the sidewalk, waving her hand to Father as he drove off. When he had gone, she cast a quick glance at Aunt Eunice's front windows. No one was looking, so she started on a run down the street.

She knew what she wanted. In the drugstore window, between the great globes of green and red, she had seen It, when Father stopped for a bottle of catarrh snuff for Gran. It was a minute, pearl-handled knife - a whole cardful of them, in

fact, at 25¢ each.

Although she had never heard the adage, Elizabeth Bess acted on the assumption that possession is nine points of law. If she asked Aunt Eunice's permission to buy the knife it might be refused; even over Father his sister exercised an affectionate tyranny and would not hesitate to revoke his permit if it seemed wise to do so; but if she went ahead and bought it, that would settle the matter. Such was the little one's premise, but alas! a false one, as

it proved.

Radiant-faced, she rushed into the house some twenty minutes later, leaving the door open behind her, (a thing Aunt Eunice abhorred), and held out the little box containing her treasure. Silently Aunt Eunice pointed to the open door, and silently her niece went and shut it, in instant recognition of the fact that the barometer was falling. There was an odour of burning cookies in the air. Truly the

moment was inopportune!

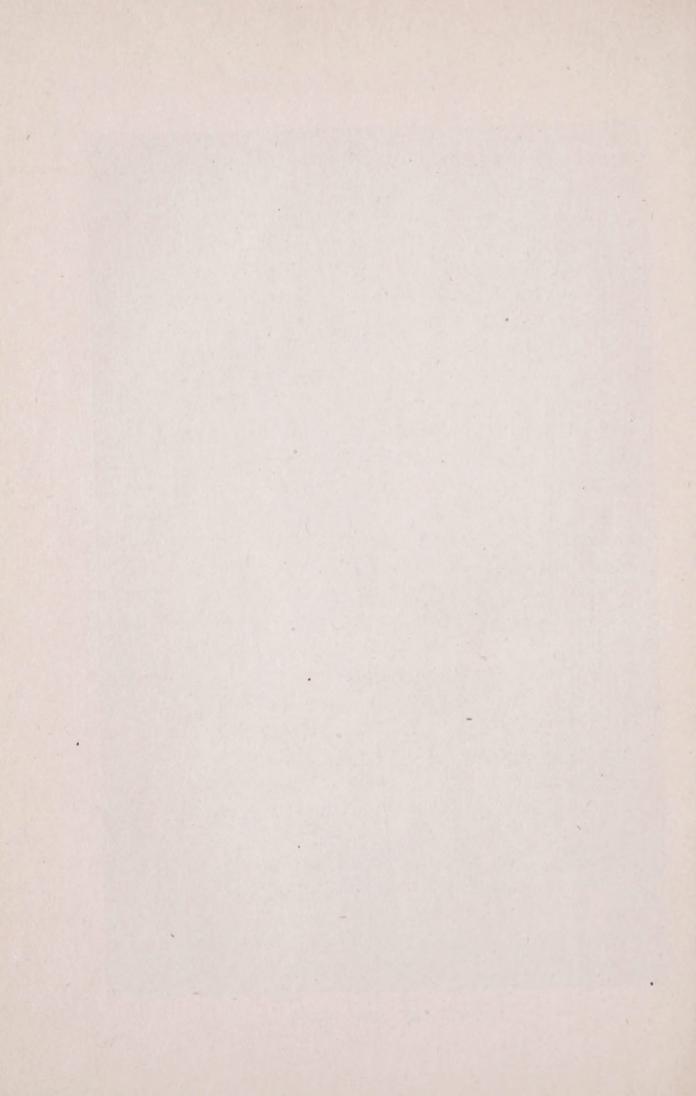
We will pass over the interview that followed. Suffice it to say that Aunt Eunice again forgot what she too seldom remembered: that she had once been a little girl herself. The words "foolishness," "extravagance," "uselessness" struck hard upon the child's ear, and almost brought the tears to her eyes. Not quite, though, for this was not like one of Mother's gentle "talks," which touched the heart and brought the tears — but a scolding. And a scolding hardens, instead of softening the heart.

"Now, you'd better take it right back to the store, and exchange it for something useful," the mentor finished. "Your poor father works too hard for his money to throw it away on gewgaws."

Slowly and sadly passed through the Postern Gate one who had entered it so joyously but a little while before. Slowly she walked down the street



"Don't say 'no 'again"



to the "Corner," and with leaden feet climbed the broad steps that led to the Portal of the Coloured Globes.

"I want to exchange this knife for something useful," she said, and something in her voice made the proprietor and his son, one old, one middle-aged, glance quickly down at her, and then across at each other. But the old man contented himself with telling her to look around and find something that suited, while the other went on painting black letters on a big, white card.

There were no end of pretty things that might also be considered useful, but they were too highpriced. There was "Magnolia Cream," that Sally Horton used for her complexion, and that Sara would have loved to use. Bess herself would have enjoyed putting the lovely, strawberry-and-creamy

stuff on her own face, but it was fifty cents.

There was a little pin-cushion of red silk, fastened in a tiny, wicker basket, but that was thirty-five. There was the dearest little mirror, with a projecting pad around the edge for pins. This was just the price of the knife; but could its pretence of usefulness withstand the Gorgon glance of Aunt Eunice? Resolutely the barterer turned her back upon it: she wasn't going to risk another sending back to exchange!

The two men were beginning to look at her curiously; she could feel their eyes on her without looking up. She must decide! And then the decision was made for her. The younger man, took the card he had been working on, and hung it above a row of little cartons on a low shelf. Elizabeth Bess slowly spelled out its facetious admonition:

Don't let a Koff karry you off! Keep Kary's Koff Drops konstantly on hand!!! Only 25¢ a Box!

The reader shivered at the thought of being karried off by a koff. That was what had happened to Janey — she had heard a woman say so at the funeral. Surely, surely, Aunt Eunice would call this a useful thing!

"I'll take a box of cough drops, please," she said, laying the knife, hot from her perspiring little hand,

down upon the counter.

Aunt Eunice threw up her hands at sight of the exchange. "But, Bess, you haven't any cold," she was beginning, when Uncle Dan'l, who had come in in the meantime and heard the story, stopped her with a look.

"No, but she might have," he asserted positively, "and they're mighty handy things to have in the house. Try one, sissy, and see if they ain't good." Sissy tried one, and found it surprisingly good, mostly liquorice and paregoric. "Try another," he whispered, when Aunt Eunice went into the pantry for a plate of the new—unburnt—cookies, sprinkled with sugar and currants for the occasion. The lady was beginning to repent of her haste, and was so kind that the visitor enjoyed her birthday dinner, in spite of her disappointment.

The afternoon she was to spend with Ruth and Dicky. So, as soon after dinner as politeness per-

mitted, she had Aunt Eunice help her on with her things, and sallied forth without fear of trolley car or automobile, up the hilly street that led across the town. At the top she turned, waved a hand to Aunt Eunice, framed in a lace-curtained front window; then, like an outgoing ship, hull down, passed out of sight on the farther side.

The caller reached Cousin Marcia's at a momentous time. Dicky had a dreadful cold, and his worried aunt was very much alarmed, not knowing whether it was lung fever, acute bronchitis or membranous croup with which he was coming down. The poor lady was on the verge of hysterics when Bess entered, and she, being fond of Cousin Mar-

cia, was delighted to be of use.

"I've got something that'll cure him right up!" she cried, carefully extracting a cough drop from the package, which she as carefully replaced in the depths of her coat pocket. "It said in the store that a cough won't carry you off if you take them, so I'm going to take them home and keep them for all winter, so's Mother won't give me any more nasty onion syrup!" "Oh, you're perfickly welcome, Cousin Marcia, and Dicky, too," in response to the lady's expressions of gratitude. "And I'm so glad, now, that I got a useful birthday present!" And then the story of it came out.

The two little girls left Dick sucking his cough drop on the sitting-room lounge, and went out into the kitchen to have a tea party with Ruth's dolls. The pair were very congenial and the time passed on golden wings. Before they realised it dusk was

falling, and Cousin Marcia called to Bess that it was time to leave.

Going in to say good-bye to Dicky, she found him apparently much worse for, between coughs, he was crying and groaning in the most heart-rending

way.

"Oh, I 'most forgot!" she exclaimed, recalled to a sense of her responsibility, and dived down into her pocket. "Why, where's my package? I'm sure I put it in this pocket! Oh, no, I was mistakened—here it is in this one!" She drew it forth. But instead of the weighed carton, requiring care to keep it from tipping and spilling, it came up travelling light, so to speak, and popped out like a handkerchief.

For the first time in her short life, Elizabeth Bess turned pale under stress of emotion. She tried to stifle the cry that rose to her lips, but its poignancy reached to Cousin Marcia above stairs and brought her upon the scene. What she saw was her visitor holding up the empty package, and gazing from it to Dicky, who was trying to hide his blackened mouth in the hollow of his arm.

"I'm so sick, so sick!" he wailed, and his symptoms were so unmistakable that Cousin Marcia rushed for a basin, returning with it just in time!

"You bad, bad little boy, to eat all Bess's candy!" she cried. "Serves you right to be sick! But I believe," she added, sotto voce, "I really believe it has saved him from membranous croup!"

Elizabeth Bess got herself into her coat and hood somehow and, flinging out of the house, went flying over the hill to Aunt Eunice's. She felt that it was too, too much! Not only to give up her dear little knife, but to be forced back into the slavery of onion syrup as well!

Just at the Postern Gate she met Aunt Eunice, who had been out to the store; but the child could not answer her salutation. She held out, however, until they got inside, then ran and threw herself down

on the couch in a storm of sobs and tears.

Aunt Eunice, for all her brusqueness, was not hard-hearted. She felt that something serious had befallen her charge and, gathering her in her arms, soothed her until she was able, brokenly, to tell the cause of her grief.

"You - you told me to get - to get a - a useful present, 'stead of my knife. And I did, and Dicky — and Dicky ate it all up, every single one! And Cousin Marcia said - Cousin Marcia said it saved him from memoryous crook, but I wish - I wish it had killed him! Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

"Oh, no! You don't wish any such thing," soothed Aunt Eunice. "'Memoryous crook!' Why, if the cough medicine saved Dicky from such a dreadful thing as that, it certainly was a useful present! Now stop crying, and see here: see what I got for your birthday when I was out. Come - sit up!"

Elizabeth Bess slowly sat up, and turned a drenched visage toward her aunt. . . . "What have you got?" she asked with a cold cynicism, for

faith in her kind was well-nigh shattered.

Aunt Eunice took from her muff a tiny package

and put it into her niece's hand. "See for your-self," said she.

Her sallow face was glowing when she finally loosened the little hands from about her neck. "If

I'd known you wanted it so much -"

"I wanted it awfully much!" interrupted the child, clasping the little knife to her, "only — only

you said it wasn't 'useful!'"

"Let me look at it"; Aunt Eunice affected to examine it with great care. "Maybe I was mistaken," she said thoughtfully. "Yes, I'm sure I was mistaken, Bess—it's begun to be useful already!"

CHAPTER XXIV

LOST - ONE WHITE HOUSE AND PICKET FENCE!

ATHER was to come in next day and take his daughter home. But shortly after dinner the door bell rang, (Bess was immensely proud of that door bell; you had to knock on the door at home), and when Aunt Eunice answered it a stranger stood there, who said he was Mr. Hale, a neighbour of the Bradfords, and that he was to take the little Bradford girl home.

"Her father is busy and couldn't come in today," Mr. Hale explained. "Please have her ready at four o'clock. My wife's coming down from Hartford on the 3:47, and we'll call for her

after that."

Bess cast an anxious glance after this curt stranger whom she dimly remembered having seen but once or twice, as he lived on the "lower road." Why in the world couldn't Father come? Or William? Strangers were — well, they were strangers.

"I s'pose I'll have to go with 'em," she said resignedly. "But we'll have to hurry, Aunt Eunice if we're to get that bag done before he comes." She spoke assertively — not to say commandingly — as she might have spoken to Mother. A new rela-

tionship had sprung up between aunt and niece since

yesterday.

"We'll have it done," promised Aunt Eunice, who was making a little silk bag to hold the knife, a red lead pencil, a striped slate pencil, a piece of chalk and a sponge, all to be used in that happy time when Elizabeth Bess Bradford should be a real school

girl!

The bag was finished long before four o'clock, and its owner was sitting at the window, looking out between the splendid lace curtains that, not content to drape the window, spread their voluminous length in semicircles upon the Brussels carpet on either side. Ever since her first visit to the house, she had had a premonition that she would one day step on, nay, catch her foot in and tear one of these lovely snares for the unwary and now, in her dread of keeping the big man waiting, it happened. Springing from her little rocker as he turned in at the Postern Gate, her foot caught and the curtain gave way. She heard Aunt Eunice gasp and exclaim, but there was no time for more. Only the depressing effect of the thing remained with the culprit, and it was a more than usually shy and silent youngster that the bigbearded farmer stowed between his wife and himself in the Portland sleigh.

Indeed, it was a taciturn trio. Mrs. Hale had asked, "How do you do?" And "Very well, thank you, ma'am," she had answered. And aside from the man's talking to his horse—a high-spirited colt, scared at its shadow - scarcely another

word was said during the four-mile drive.

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Owing to the speed at which they were travelling, the child's little red hood was slipping from her head; and when she put up her hand to pull it back, Mr. Hale told her brusquely that she'd have to keep her hand down out of his way. She would have frozen before touching it again, but Mrs. Hale came to the rescue and held the hood in place until, a few minutes later, they pulled up at a cross road.

The man handed the reins to his wife, and jumped out into the snow, and held out his hands to lift little Bess down. "Here's where you get out, sister," he said, not unkindly. But at the moment another sleigh met them, and in it sat Miss Lois Horton. Now Bess had not been quite comfortable in Miss Lois's presence since Christmas Day when the Little Quaker Lady had come in, an anxious look on her face, to ask if any one had seen her ring. She thought that it might perhaps have fallen from her finger into the straw in the bottom of the Bradford sleigh the night before.

The changing expression on the small sinner's face during the inquiry led Miss Lois to ask her, personally. "Yes," she answered, recollecting gradually. "It was in your must when I took it for my

hands."

"And why didn't you tell me?" Miss Lois de-

manded reproachfully.

"I—I meant to. But I wanted to wear it on my finger for a minute first, and then — and then I fell asleep and forgot it," she had confessed guiltily.

All this came back to Elizabeth Bess in the moment that it took the other sleigh to pass. All this,

and more: the fruitless search for the ring, and its owner's disappointment; even the pathetic little droop of her shoulders as she returned up the road, following the forlorn hope of finding the trinket in the snow.

"Come, come!" The sharply spoken words recalled Bess to her senses. She jumped up and held out her arms to Mr. Hale, who set her down in the frozen track. "You know your way home from here, don't you?" he asked. "Right up that road, straight along till you get to your house on the hill beyond the bridge. You do know the way, don't you?" he asked again, curbing his impatience, for the colt was crazy to go on. And little Bess managed to get out a tremulous "Y-yes, sir—I—I guess so."

"Straight on up the road — you can't miss it. Run right along before you get chilled," he said,

and climbed back into the sleigh.

"Terribly moony child!" he grumbled as they started off. "Thought from all accounts that the Bradford youngsters were more than usually bright, but this one—"

Mrs. Hale turned for a backward glance at the little traveller, and caught a fleeting glimpse of her, standing faced toward home, when the colt gave a sidewise jump that nearly snapped her neck off short, and just missed overturning the sleigh. And so the poor, maligned child was forgotten.

As for her, the moment her feet touched the ground something seemed to go wrong with her head. All sense of direction left it. The fairly

familiar road, (she journeyed but seldom), became unknown territory. It was as if she had never seen it before!

Which way had that man said for her to go? To the left, in the little hollow, was Mrs. Cone's house where she often went with Mother, but it was out of sight. The white house on the right she did not recognise. She looked away to the straight road ahead which her late companions had taken and discovered them stopped less than a furlong away, that estimable colt having balked at a dog that came barking out at him.

Here, then, was hope! She would run and catch up to the Hales, and ask them to show her again the

right way home!

Long training, with William as pace-maker, had engendered fleetness. But before the little sprinter had covered half the distance between them the Hales had again got started, this time at a gallop.

Despairing, she called to them. She screamed, she shrieked, but they heard her not. And when, a minute later, the sleigh disappeared over the crest of Long Hill she gave up. With her throat and chest one burning ache, her legs straws that doubled under her weight, she toppled into a bed of reeds by a roadside brook, and lay still.

After a little, she got to her feet and looked around her. She heard the jingle of sleigh bells, and presently, back over the way the Hales had gone came another team, driven by a man in a big fur cap and an enveloping wool "tippet," wound around and around his neck and lower face.

The wayfarer decided to appeal to him. "Mister," she said in a piteous little voice, as he came by, and looking straight into his eyes, (his only visible feature). "Can you tell me where Mr. William Bradford lives, in a white house and picket fence?"

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" The words came from under the peaked cap, as the man threw the robes off his knees, and jumped out into the snow. "Child alive! Where did you drop from?" he

asked, lifting her in his arms.

"Oh, Chinney, Chinney!" sobbed the Wee One, clinging to him, her cheek against his. "Oh, Chin-

ney! Chinney!"

"Never mind, now — never mind!" he comforted her, holding all the robes close around her shivering little body. "We'll be home in a jiffy, now, so stop crying, and tell me how you got lost."

There was silence for a long minute after the recital, except for the driver's urging of his horse.

Then the Wee One said:

" Chinney?"

"Yes, my pet."

"Chinney, don't you ever, ever, ever tell!"

"I never, never, never will!" answered Chinney.

CHAPTER XXV

"MY WEE-UM!"

66 T S she very ill, Doctor?" Mother asked, follow-

ing him to the door.

"Let us hope it's only a hard cold," answered the old man evasively. "Keep her in bed, of course, and give her the medicine regularly—when she's awake. I'll come again in the morning. In the meantime, if she should take a bad turn—a sinking spell, or anything like that, send for me at once."

"But, Doctor!—" But the doctor had closed the door firmly behind him, and was half way to the

gate.

It was the third day after little Bess's adventure in the snow. Not a word had she said about getting lost, or about her quest for the "white house and picket fence," so her family supposed she had taken a chill on the long, cold drive. The cold had grown rapidly worse, until now pneumonia, ("lung fever" it was in the Sixties), had developed.

She had told the story of the knife and the stolen cough drops, so when in her delirium she would plead with Dicky to give back her medicine, so that the cough wouldn't carry her off, the reference was understandable; but they could not understand her cries to the Hales to "Wait!" and not to leave her.

The Cheneys were at the house when she asked, pleadingly, to be shown where Mr. William Bradford lived, in a "white house, and picket fence." And the little man's perturbation was so evident that Mother became suspicious, and made him tell, under promise of secrecy, what he knew about the case.

"But you must never let her know I told you!" Chinney enjoined. "She said once that I told her a story; and if she ever finds out that I broke my

promise --"

The doctor found his patient no worse in the morning; and in the afternoon the fever did not reach high water mark as it had been doing; so the anxious family rejoiced. Toward night, however, the pendulum swung to the other extreme: she lay so still and pale, her breath the barest flutter, that Father announced he was going for the doctor. A drizzling rain was falling and freezing as it fell, making it almost impossible for a horse to keep his feet.

"It's easier for me to walk than to hold up a horse, and on foot I can take all the short cuts, and save time!" he declared, between swallows of the

scalding tea that Mother made him drink.

It seemed ominous that the little one thought she was going on a journey. "I'll go — if you'll go — Mother!" she would whisper between spells of coughing, until the sleep of utter exhaustion overtook her.

Supper was over, and the chores done. Sara, red eyed and solemn visaged, was drying the dishes, and every other minute tiptoeing to the bedroom door. William had taken off his wet boots and was warming his feet by the fire when a cry from Mother brought him up standing.

"Boy, go for Mrs. Cone — Bess is dying! Go quick — quick!" she urged shrilly, but William had already gone. He had caught up a shawl and thrown it across his shoulders, and was half way

down the icy hill in a dozen seconds.

"He's gone in his bare feet!" cried Sara, throwing open the door, and peering into the darkness. Sara dashed the tears from her eyes and went back to her mother, who was chafing the child's cold hands and entreating her to speak to her.

A faint sigh was the only answer. The bed clothes above the little chest slowly lifted, and as slowly sank. This continued for some minutes, the intervals between breaths lengthening fearfully; until at length no further movement rewarded the watchers.

Faster than the wind William flew down the icy hill, where he and his little sister had so often coasted. Over the Bridge of the Phoebe's Nest he went safely in the black darkness. Past the road-side tree where one of her many "houses" was located, and where they had minded the cows together on the wide, grassy roadsides. Burning tears mingled with the sleet as William ran, sobbing, along

the familiar way that he might never again travel with her.

Without warning, he burst in upon the astonished

neighbours.

"Mother wants you, Mrs. Cone — our Bess is dying!" he panted, and would have flung out again, but the man of the house caught him by the arm and made him pull on a pair of shoes, while Fred Cone lit a lantern and his mother put some remedies into her satchel.

Mrs. Cone was one who had missed her vocation: She was a born doctor, and the hour was never too late or too early for her to lend a ministering hand.

Two of her sons were ready to convoy her up the hills, when Albert, another son, drove up from town. The horse was in a lather, after an hour's slipping and sliding on the icy road; but George put his mother in the sleigh and got in beside her. William was already running on ahead. The Cones overtook him at the bridge, so he was constrained to stop and hold the lantern for George to blanket his horse by, but he followed on the heels of Mrs. Cone, for whom Sara was holding open the door.

William scarcely recognised his mother in the stricken woman who thrust out both hands to her neighbour, and said between tearing sobs,

"Oh, Mary, you're too late - she's gone!"

William did not believe it! It was not true it couldn't be true, that his little sister had left him without saying good-bye! Leaving Mrs. Cone to condole with Mother, he slipped into the bedroom; and throwing himself down beside the little, still

figure, gathered it into his arms.

"Wake up, Lizabeth Bess!" he said, pressing his cold cheek to hers. "Do you hear me?" He shook her roughly, before the protesting women could stop him. "It's William that's talking to you — wake up and speak to me this minute!". . . And then the wonder happened.

"Look!" cried Mother, pointing. "Look— Look!" For the child's eyelids were fluttering—lifting and twitching. Then the eyes opened wide, and stared into William's. She tried to lift

a hand to his cheek.

"My — Wee-um!" she whispered. Then the baby chest began to rise and fall ever so slightly; a faint, faint colour crept into her cheeks. And when Father and the doctor arrived, she was sleep-

ing naturally.

"H'm — yes, I've heard of such things — of a shock bringing one back apparently from the dead, but I never saw it before," said the doctor. "Of course it was not death, but suspended animation. My dear women, people do not come back from the dead, just for being called! However, she's back!" he conceded with a smile, "and with the fever broken, and the heart resuming its functions, the little girl has a fighting chance — a fighting chance!"

And Elizabeth Bess proceeded to make the most of it!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

T was the last day of school, and Elizabeth Bess Bradford was going!

In the Sixties there was no "Commencement" in leafy June; at least not in the rural districts. Two terms, one of four months in the dead of winter and one of three in the heat of summer, constituted the school year. The winter term, under the proud rule of the man teacher was now about to end. It was arranged, however, that the same hand would bend the twig the following winter. The Soldiers' Monument project, which he had successfully carried through, had endeared Mark Dillon to the Green Hills heart!

"As usual," William had pessimistically remarked, Mother was a bit dubious about letting the youngest go. The snow that should have come in February had descended plentifully about the middle of March. Much of it was still on the ground, and the roads, except in early morning and late afternoon, were very bad. Bess could not walk the mileand-a-half each way, that was certain. But when William declared it would be fun to draw her on his sled, Mother let him have his way. So "Last Day" the little sister went in state on the big, home-

made sled,— Sara and William her proud convoys. And for one of the trio, it came near being the "last

day," indeed!

There had been a sharp frost the previous night, and the snow crust was firm for the first half of the journey. This being across lots, and mostly down hill, was a delightful experience. Sara, being a big sister, never thought of occupying a seat on the sled when the youngest was along. She would tuck the tot's coat under her; and William, with high-flung heels, would push behind for a few yards, then hop on with one knee, the other foot swinging rudderlike behind.

"Cock your beaver!" he would cry, which was a classic way of requesting his passenger to incline her head, so that he could see where to steer. Then, away like the wind they would go, Sara, a slimlegged Mercury, endeavouring with giant strides to

keep up.

They crossed the sawmill brook below the dam on the ice; then on down another hill, which brought them to the road. And by that time, the fun was about over. The sun had come out bright, softening the snowcrust, and turning the roads to slush; and William was sweating like a dray horse at the journey's end.

From the first minute that the school was reached, the new pupil felt that she was getting her money's worth. Just before the session opened, two of the big boys came stamping in from the woodshed, each carrying a section of log for the fire. One of them remarked, as he laid his stick down beside the long,

box stove, that he was afraid it was too long, but

it was the last piece in the shed.

"If they are too long we can leave the stove door open a while until they get burned off at one end," the teacher replied. "There's a good draught, and I don't think it will smoke."

The Wee One, who was eyeing the logs, suddenly discovered a round hole in one of them. This was plainly recognisable as the door of a yellow-hammer's house; and in a moment, the snow had disappeared, the grass was growing green, the sun was shining on the old apple trees in the orchard, and she and William . . .

She roused from her dream of summer, and then fell to wondering whether, by any chance, the yellow-hammer had not gone South with her friends in the Fall. The blue-jays and the woodpeckers and the chickadees stayed North all winter. Supposing, now! Leaving her seat, Elizabeth Bess tiptoed over to the log, and stooping, hands behind her back, peered into the round hole.

There was a titter, which broadened into a laugh, but the little girl in blue delaine was quite uncon-

scious of the stir she was causing.

"Teacher," she said earnestly, straightening up and looking him in the eyes, "don't burn up this

stick; there's a yellow-hammer in it!"

"Oh, I think not," the teacher answered, smiling. "There might have been, once, but that's an old log that had been lying on the ground a long time. The bird would not stay in it after the tree was cut down."

"But it might have gone back at night, out of the cold," she insisted but trembling at her boldness. "I saw its yellow and black feathers. Oh, you can hear it, too! It's making a noise, now: just put

your ear down, and you'll hear it!"

Sara, her face very red, went after her sister. With a not very gentle twitch she turned her around and was marching her back to the seat when the teacher interposed. "Wait a minute, and we'll investigate," he said. Taking a map pointer, he prodded gently in the hole where the little one had seen the "black and yellow feathers" moving.

There was an instant response, a noise like the rattling of corn when you put it in the popper and

shake it hard.

The teacher was not smiling when he withdrew the pointer and straightened up, all with one motion. His face was pale as he reached for an ink bottle, and jammed it, funnelwise, in the hole.

"Open the outside door, Horton," he said to Bunt; as, lifting the log, he carried it at arm'slength from the room and pitched it out into a snow-

drift.

Most of the boys, after the first moment of surprise, rushed after the teacher, curiosity getting the better of discipline. Anyway, wasn't it the Last Day? But he stopped them with a muscular arm across the entry doorway. "Go back," he said quietly; "that yellow-hammer was a rattlesnake that had denned up in the log for the winter. The warmth was waking him up, but we'll let him cool off in the snow and attend to his case later."

"The little girl with the imagination," as the teacher called her, was, of course, the heroine of the hour. When the teacher, beaming at her over his glasses, remarked that he hoped he'd have her for a scholar, next winter, (all pupils were "scholars" in the Sixties!), the other scholars applauded to the echo.

At recess, the teacher said that all the children with the exception of the large boys, would remain in their places for a little while. He called the names of these large boys, and to the utter amazement and chagrin of the small Elizabeth Bess, William's was not among them! So presently a little hand began to wave, timidly, but determinedly, in the teacher's direction. Catching her eye, the pedagogue nodded encouragingly.

Bess cleared her throat. "Teacher," she said distinctly, "you forgot one big boy — you forgot

my brover Wee-um."

It was William's turn to redden, while the girls giggled and the husky young farmers guffawed. "Teacher" had a momentary feeling of thankfulness that this was not "next" winter!

With a slap of his ruler upon the desk, he compelled silence, "So, I did forget!" he bowed to his mentor. "William Bradford, step into line."

When the rattlesnake had been despatched, and buried under a rock that it took the combined forces to move, William went back into the school house for his sister. His ears still burned over the "big brother" business, but he thought, with a little stir at his heart, that she had meant well.

She was sitting alone listlessly turning the leaves of a primer, and her eyes brightened as if a sunbeam had suddenly found them, at sight of him. William threw a scornful glance to where, on the corner back seat, Lester Bond was ostensibly helping Sara with her examples, but the pair were blissfully unconscious of his scorn. Putting on the little red coat and hood, he led their wearer forth by the hand, reckless as to whether or not any one called him a "sissy" for, since the night when he had so nearly lost her, William could hardly bear her out of his sight.

Then it was that the small Elizabeth Bess made a discovery. Torture would not have drawn from her the admission which she was forced now to make to herself: William was not a big boy! Indeed, he did not come up to the shoulders of some of these six-footers. But — and she hugged the thought to her bosom — he was smarter'n any of 'em! Hadn't he just gone to the head of the Fourth Reader Class? And when Teacher told him to go to the board and do an example, you just should have seen William make that chalk fly! And then when he stepped back and turned to the room, and Teacher said, "Right! Take your seat," you could not have convinced William's sister that he did not top Hank Peters, who towered above Teacher! But that, alas! was a happy hour ago!

Even in this dark hour, however, dawn was at hand! As they went out together, she saw a lot of boys holding the arms of Hank Peters, while an-

other belaboured him with his fists.

"Whale him good!" they urged the castigator. "Knock some sense into the big duffer. Nineteen years old, and only in the third reader. Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, and one to grow on. Now let me at him!"

Thus was the child's misery turned to joy. What a silly she had been: William was young — Why, he was only thirteen! By the time he was nineteen, he would be as big, and as smart as Father. That was the last word, for added to his other splendid attributes and characteristics, Father was

the biggest, and smartest man in the world.

The boys were snow-balling now, and among them Bess particularly noticed a lively, black-eyed little chap, whom his companions called Cricket. He and a loutish looking fellow called Piggy were having a fierce battle, when Piggy suddenly dropped his face in the bend of his elbow and, pawing up the snow with one foot, began to bawl: "Oh, Cricket, ye've put me eye out — ye've put me eye out!"

Bess stiffened with the horror of it. But presently, when the victim uncovered his face, behold! the eye was not out at all! Mis-er-a-ble old story

teller!

During the noon recess, Cricket, who lived near the school, came back from his dinner, leading a little sister by either hand. One was a mere tot of three or thereabouts, with fair hair and blue eyes, and so shy that she clung mutely to Cricket's hand every moment until the bell rang. This, with its attendant rush, scared the tot so that he had to take her home to her mother. The other one, blackeyed and alert like Cricket, stayed, and Bess and she presently became friends — a friendship that survived and brightened all their subsequent years.

It was at the Last Recess that Elizabeth Bess beheld for the first time, two fellow beings in mortal combat. For, if it were not mortal combat, would the luckless one upon whom the other was kneeling—would he cry out in agonised accents, "Oh, Dave, yer killin' me! O-o-h! My stummick—my stummick!"

And the big boys stood around grinning, doing nothing whatever to prevent murder! Neither did William do anything! But his sister defended him on the ground of this new assumption: William was a little boy.

Had she but known, William beheld the conflict with unseeing eyes. His whole attention was engaged with the problem of appearing unconscious of the sly gibes about "My big brover Wee-um" which were being passed around.

It did not occur to the child to tell the teacher about the fight. Indeed, she could think of nothing but the awful scene before her. Suddenly, with a piercing cry, she ran to William and, clutching him with two icy little hands, buried her face against his breast.

William, to whom a fight, either as participant or spectator, was all in the day's work of a schoolboy, could not think at first what was the matter with her. "Are you sick, or what ails you?" he asked her. "Do you want Sara? Tell me, this minute! What is it?"

"Stop them - stop them!" she whispered

tragically, burrowing deeper into his jacket.

William put a reassuring arm about her, holding her close while he called out, as one in authority, "Come fellows, quit it! Dave, get off Dutch,

and let him up, I tell you!"

But Dave paid not the slightest attention to William. It is harrowing to think how the thing might have ended had not Jeff Wingate, a recent "graduate" of that hall of learning, happened to be passing on his ox-sled. Jumping off, he ran over and administered a few swift kicks to the combatants, together with a muttered admonition to "Stop it, before you scare Billy Bradford's little sister into fits!"

"Come, Bess, they've stopped now," William stooped to tell her, and she opened her eyes on the wonder! Jeff Wingate had gone on his way; she knew nothing of his interference. The inference—the conviction, rather—was that those big boys had stopped fighting at the mere word of William!

Shortly after noon, by one of the sudden changes incident to the New England climate, the wind shifted to the north again, and the air grew chill with a hint of coming snow. By the time school was out at four o'clock the slush in the road had frozen sufficiently to bear, but was so rough and hubby that William gladly forsook the highway for the fields when the crosslots place was reached, on the way home.

Lester Bond had carried Sara's books as far as he went, the two walking side by side and talking

in low, confidential tones. When Lester dropped off at his own gate and Sara joined her brother and sister her reception was distinctly not cordial. William made some sarcastic remarks, to which Sara replied airily that "Little Billy Bradford thinks he's smart!"

If there was any one thing that roused Bess's ire, it was to hear William called "Billy." Add to this the opprobrious epithet "little" and consider the trait'rous use of these by one of the family!—

"You go on home, you old sass-box!" cried the enraged little sister, striking out at her as she passed. "I'll just tell Mother on you — see if I don't!"

Sara tossed her pretty head and switched her skirts, and remarked that she was going home 'round by the road to stop and help Aunt Hannah Bostwick! Aunt Hannah was the neighbourhood invalid whom all the school children liked and helped, from carrying in her wood to baking her tea biscuits. So she left them at the crosslots place, and went on alone.

What had been down hill on the morning journey was uphill now, and William, though uncomplaining, was dog tired by the time the sawmill brook was reached. To his dismay, he found that the ice they had crossed on in the morning had broken up and gone out, so high had the morning's thaw raised the water which was running over the dam above in places. The usually shallow little stream was now a muddy torrent, running bank high.

The boy's heart failed him at the sight. Alone,

he would not have feared, but with his little sister in

charge —

A little farther down the stream, a plank was laid from bank to bank, and this was used as a foot bridge except in times when the stream was frozen over. Ordinarily a good three feet above the water, now it caught the crest of the flood which broke into spray above it. Alone, William would have taken this in a hop, skip and jump. But Bess was scared. When he wanted to carry his books and sled across she clung to him, whimpering, begging him not to leave her — to go back around the road as Sara had done.

"We can't, Bess—it would be dark night before we got home, 'way 'round by the road! I'll carry you across: but you'll have to carry the books in your arms if you won't let me go across with them first. I'll swing the sled over, and the dinner pail. But I can't throw my books over into the wet snow."

"No," agreed the trembling child. "I'll carry

the books, Wee-um."

"All right." Stooping, he placed the strapped books across his shoulders. "Now, Bess, climb on, and lie flat down on the books. That'll hold them in place, and you hang on 'round my neck, tight as a

tick, and we'll be across in a jiffy."

The small sister's spirits began to rise, since she did not have to cross on foot but on William's back, which had provided safe convoy on so many occasions. Her only anxiety now was about the books, especially the enormous geography and slate; for these were the articles that gave prestige to the

"scholar." By their size were his attainments

judged.

Confidently the passenger climbed aboard, her chin hooked over the edge of the slate and bearing down hard. But even at that they began to slip, the very moment William straightened himself and took the first step.

Here and there upon the plank the spray had frozen, leaving little patches of ice. Alone, William would not have given these a second thought, so sure-footed was he; but now he picked his steps carefully. With his precious cargo, he must take no chances.

"Hurry up, Wee-um - the books is slipping!" urged the passenger, babbling the words with her hampered chin. "Oh, hurry up, Wee-um!"

"Let them go!" shouted William. "Stop

squirming, and let them go!"

"Let them go! Drop them!" he screamed

again, as the frail bridge dipped and teetered.

But Elizabeth Bess Bradford would not let them go. Not knowing that she was endangering William and herself in a desperate effort to save the precious books, she let go her hold of his neck, and

made a frantic clutch at the slipping bundle.

Disaster followed. The weight of his burden thus suddenly shifted, was too much for William's equilibrium. He felt himself slipping, falling, but, with a lightning manœuvre worthy of an acrobat, he righted himself. Only for a moment, though; but in that moment, putting up his hands, he took his little sister under the arms and threw her over his

head into the snow on the farther bank. The momentum sent him whirling into the icy water that carried him along, now on the surface, now in the depths, blindly reaching for something to grasp.

Meantime Elizabeth Bess, scratched by the crust and blinded by the snow under it, got to her feet in hot indignation. She got the snow out of her eyes just in time to see William's head appear above the water a couple of rods away. One shout he gave before the water swirled him under again, and with an answering shriek and another and another she started after him along the bank, her red, hooded cloak making a zigzag scarlet line as she ran, stumbling and falling and rising again.

The sawyers in the mill above, hearing the screams, rushed out to see what was the matter. The flitting red cloak gave them a clue which they followed until it disappeared in the alder bushes beyond the bend, but her voice still led them on.

Down where the stream widened and shallowed in an alder swamp, they found the child, down on her knees in the snow, tugging with all her might at something in the water,— something which they would have passed by unseeing, so covered was it with the refuse that gathers on dead water, but which his sister had recognised as William's fair hair. The partly submerged limb of a tree was all that had saved him; for the water had washed him against, and partly upon it. Even as it was, it took a good half hour to get the water out of his lungs and bring him to, after they got him back to the little office room in the mill.

His sister refused to leave him, so they stood her up before the little "pot" stove to dry while one of the sawyer's helpers hurried to the Bradford home, returning presently with Father and Sara and blankets. Mother had gone to town after Grandmother, who had been spending the winter in Middletown with another daughter; when she returned the excitement was over, except that Bess would not be comforted for the loss of William's precious books.

"Oh, somewhere between here and the Connecticut River," Father had answered when she en-

quired about their probable whereabouts.

"And 'twas my fault that they got lost," she mourned, "and now Wee-um can't go to school no more, and when he's nineteen he won't be President a single bit!"

"What's that?" Father asked. "Our William going to be President? Well, we can't let a few

books stand in the way of a thing like that!"

His small daughter eyed him suspiciously. Did he mean it, or was he fooling? You couldn't always tell!

"Will you get him new books, Father?" she

asked, coming and climbing onto his knee.

"After saving our Bess? Well, I guess so!" said Father, and she knew he wasn't fooling. "And for saving our William, our Bess shall have a new book and slate, too, so she can go to school with him in the Fall, and grow up and be Presidentess!"

CHAPTER XXVII

"WHEN A WOMAN WILL -"

As his recovery progressed—his eyes becoming stronger, and the pains in his head less severe—the pleasant intimacy that had prevailed between the Little Quaker Lady and himself had diminished; imperceptibly, almost, but none the less certainly.

Jim, aware as he was of her natural shyness, thought the change due to the reaction from what had been the serious business of caring for him in his helplessness. To make sure that it was nothing more, he resolved once again to put to her the all important question. And he chose the incident of

the missing ring as the occasion.

"Why search for it longer, Lois?" he asked her gently when, on Christmas evening, he carried her the book of poems and box of candy he had bought for her. "Why not end it here and now, and the other hopeless quest with it? Oh, my dear, it isn't right that you should wear your life out, chasing after a shadow — a shadow that has already darkened and saddened it so terribly! Give it up, Lois! Give your dear life into my keeping, sweetheart. As the poet says here "— he tapped the book upon

the table, 'Let the dead past bury its dead!' Can't

you do it?" he pleaded. "Don't say 'no 'again!"
"Oh, Jim, dear, I can't say anything else!" cried
Lois in distress. "Do believe me when I say I have tried - I have tried, hard - but it's no use! And you surely would not want a wife who did not love you - and who did love somebody else: would you?"

"No, I would not. I could not share you, even with a dead man," Jim answered. "This is the last,

then? I am not to hope any longer?"

"No - don't hope any longer!" she said with a quick eagerness. "If you think we can be friends, I shall be glad. Otherwise - forget me."

Jim drew a long breath. "I'm afraid I can't do either — and stay near you, anyway. But then I don't have to stay."

"No, you don't have to stay," Lois repeated. Oddly enough, at that moment there arose before her mind a picture of the splendid nurse in the Philadelphia hospital, and her interest in the handsome patient with the bandaged eyes. "Would you go back to Philadelphia?" she asked innocently.

Jim gave her a questioning glance. Was it telepathy? Or why did the same picture arise before his

eyes - painted at a stroke from memory?

"I might," he said reflectively. "There are fine opportunities to be had in a big city." Then a little mist of constraint fell between them, and presently the Little Quaker Lady once more said good-bye to Jim, this time with a definiteness that left him no room for hope.

And so Uncle Jim had gone. Elizabeth Bess told Susie and Rose what she thought of it, in the monotonous days when there was no one to tell bedtime stories, or play checkers, or bring little gifts home from town with him. "There's no Howell, no Uncle Jim, no nobody but just our own selves in this fambly! I whisht I could go to school, or do something! Burfa can't come down 'cause of the old snow, and I can't go up there! I whisht spring would come, and stay for ever 'n' ever!"

As if in answer to the little one's wish for spring, a very good imitation of it visited Green Hills early in February. There had been a sweeping January thaw which cleared the ground of snow; and then came a few days of weather so warm and balmy as

to be phenomenal.

Father was planning to fence off a garden on a southerly slope of the Round Hill pasture which the wash from the hills had made rich. It was a custom of the neighbourhood to exchange labour—one helping out another when he had nothing pressing of his own to do—so Father and Chinney were down there now, splitting rails and "holing" fence posts. The important part of this to Bess was that she had been commissioned to bring out their usual half-past nine o'clock luncheon.

She had not yet worn the inherited rubber boots and, as the warm sunshine had drawn the frost out of the ground, making it somewhat soft and muddy, their owner thought it a good opportunity to initiate them. She begged so hard that Mother at length told her to go to the garret and bring them down,

although she felt sure they were still too large for the child's wear.

She came hobbling down stairs, the boots already on, thinking that Mother would not have the heart to make her remove them and put on shoes. But this the cruel parent proceeded to insist upon.

"And be quick about it, too!" she said. "It's after half-past nine now. They'll think I've forgot-

ten them!"

"Oh, Mother, please let me wear them this once!" their new owner begged, almost in tears.

"But they're so large, child! You couldn't walk

in them!"

"I'll be so careful, Mother! And, 'sides, if I wait to lace up my shoes again, Father and Chinney 'll be starved!" This crafty argument led Mother to glance anxiously at the clock: it was a quarter of ten. She was washing, and the boiler on the stove threatened an eruption. It was too full; so she caught up the handiest thing—the pitcher that had held the luncheon tea—and began dipping some of the suds into a tub. Meanwhile telling her daughter to "Go on, then, and be very, very careful!"

There was a sly smile on the lunch-bearer's face as she set out — a smile that broadened and deepened as savoury odours rose to her nostrils from basket and pail.

"Smells as if it might be biscuit and gingerbread bofe!" she commented blissfully as she started down the hill back of the house. She had chosen the stubble field as less muddy than the road. "I do hope Mother put in my little cup, and that Father 'll fill it over 'n' over!"

"Gracious! This hill is slippery! And muddy! I never thought grass'd be muddy!" as the loose soil lifted with each step, and made great cushions on the boot soles. Not only this, but the soggy earth sucked so determinedly that it was with difficulty she could lift her feet after putting them down.

Clearly, disaster was impending. Her heels began to draw up out of place and wobble around in the boots, the basket flew up and the pail flopped down, and in another minute Elizabeth Bess measured her length upon the ground.

Mother, hanging out clothes, heard her crying as she came back up the hill, dejection — nay, despair,

in every line of her little figure.

"Well?" demanded Mother, knowing that it was anything but well — the muddy basket and dripping pail telling their own story.

"I - I slipped! I fell down!" sobbed Eliza-

beth Bess.

"W-e-ll, I should say you did! And it serves you right for being a naughty, headstrong girl — if it were not for the men losing their lunch!" said Mother. "Now go in and take off your muddy clothes, and go to bed!"

Sitting upon her little "cricket" behind the kitchen stove to take off the boots, she wept dismally, for hungry Father and Chinney, as well as for herself. The boots she eyed with limitless disgust. Miserable things! They might sell them to Johnny Ma-

hone and welcome! She would never put them on

again!

Thus resolved, she was climbing the stairs to bed, when Father's voice fell upon her ear. From afar he had seen and heard enough to lead him to investigate, and now would have comforted and consoled his offspring, but Mother would not allow it.

"Yes, as it happens, there's more gingerbread," the culprit above stairs heard Mother tell him. "And there's boiling water; it won't take a minute

to make another pot of tea."

So! They were all going to have their lunch, while she must go hungry to bed! Not even a cup of tea for her. Quick tears welled again to her eyes but she dashed them away and, slipping around to the back stairs, made her way down to where she could peek into the kitchen. The big majolica pitcher was standing on the table. Mother always strained the luncheon tea into the majolica pitcher. Perhaps there was a little left!

Mother had gone down cellar for cream, and Father was whetting his post axe outside the door while he waited. Making a rapid skirmish in her stocking feet across the kitchen floor, Elizabeth Bess tilted the pitcher and looked in. Yessir! there was a little of the pale, creamy-looking liquid in the bot-

tom of it.

Mother's step was on the cellar stairs. Hurriedly Bess lifted the big pitcher to her lips and drained its scanty contents — of soap suds — at a gulp.

Mother thought she heard a gasping, spluttering

cry, but the kitchen was untenanted when she reached it.

"I must have been mistaken," she said. Washing the sudsy pitcher at the sink, she poured the fresh tea into it to send out to Chinney, while upstairs, her apron crammed into her burning mouth, the victim of circumstances flung herself face downward on her own bed.

She landed on something hard, but it yielded with a sharp snap, as of breaking wood. Fearfully she raised herself to see what had happened, but well—all too well—she knew. That morning, for a canopy over the Christmas doll, she had been using her blue parasol: the one with the white handle and a knob on the end. Afterwards she had laid it on the bed where it still lay, but in two parts. The lovely white handle was broken squarely in half!

And yet outside, the sun was shining, and a bluebird was singing; and she would presently have to arise, and take up the burden of life once more!

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BIG DAY

I was the morning of the big day — the day of the Dedication of the Soldiers' Monument. Even in their minds they spelled it with capitals — these people of Green Hills and the surrounding hamlets, who had made substantial sacrifices in order to bring the memorial into being.

Not since the memorable day when the soldiers had marched away to save the Union, or possibly those later days when one and another flag-draped coffin had been brought back to the little town, had

excitement run so high.

The Little Quaker Lady, who had been made a sort of publicity agent, sent little narrative sketches telling of the coming event not only to the local, but also to some of the leading city papers; and these were read with pride under the evening lamp, and

passed from one household to another.

Of course, every one was going. The Bradfords, from Gran down, had all preparations completed the day before. Bess's gala outfit of white, plus a sash and hair ribbon of red, white and blue, reposed on the bed in the spare chamber. Also the little white silk mitts to be used in the unveiling; for Miss Eliza-

beth Bradford, being the youngest relative of any of the soldier dead, was to pull the cord that unveiled the monument!

But even greatness palls at times: there are moments when the king, if he might, would lay down the crown and sceptre and take up the cap and bells. Bess had heard so much talk about the great occasion that it had grown a bit tiresome; Sara had dinned into her head over and over the few lines she was to speak at the moment of the unveiling, and had even rigged up a dummy with a sheet and piece of clothes line, to the undisguised amusement of William, who had so "plagued" the child by mimicking her "primpy" dress rehearsal that she was almost ready to throw up the engagement.

So now, dinner being over, and a half hour at her disposal before it was time to dress, she betook herself from the scene of uplift and exaltation and, climbing into the dusty sleigh on the barn floor, opened the little window, and "looked forth o'er dale and down." It was the perfection of a May day: a brisk breeze was blowing and turning the ripples on the pond to silver, and the odours of wild flowers and young grass and strawberry blossoms

were borne to her nostrils.

With a sigh of deep content she took from the pocket of her apron a three-cent piece, a ten-cent shinplaster, a five-cent one, and three big "coins," all given her by an appreciative family for the purchase of peanuts and popcorn balls at the park in the afternoon. She had deemed it wise, as each donation was made, to say nothing of the previous

ones; but here, in the seclusion of the barn, it was safe to take them all out and gloat over them.

Spend them all to-day? No, indeed! Not with so many pretty things in the Marion stores, and a growing balance in the tin bank in the kitchen to buy

them with, when it should be enough!

No, the three-cent piece and the coins were all that were to be spent to-day. She folded the two little bills into a flat wad, and stuffed them back in the apron pocket. The coppers and the silver piece she was jingling in the hollow of her hands when the slim disc slipped between her fingers to the bottom of the sleigh, and thence out of sight in a crack.

Instantly the owner was after it. Under the sleigh she ducked, picked the piece out of the hay dust and was hastily withdrawing when, miscalculating the height of the sleigh body from the floor, she bumped her head, hard; so hard that it seemed as

if her skull must be dented.

She clapped her hand to the place, and then looked to see what it was that had hurt her so. Originally, the floor of the sleigh had been bolted to a supporting iron strap or brace underneath. One of the bolts had sometime worked through and been lost, and Father had repaired the damage by driving a big nail through the holes in floor and brace, and clinching it by bending it back like a U. It was this U that had dented the Wee One's head; but she forgot her hurt in delighted astonishment as she surveyed it.

The point of the nail was directly underneath the crack that had swallowed the three-cent piece, and

over this point had slipped the little chain ring that was lost the night before Christmas. There it still hung, sagging and secure, where a band ring would

have been promptly jolted off!

Her first impulse was to rush into the house with her find; but, if she did, they would take it away from her, the very first thing. And instead of being thanked she would probably be lectured again, and made to feel mean! Grown folks were so lofty and virtuous, ("so smart and so nice!" Bess put it), that they never did anything wrong or made any mistakes! She flushed, recalling the scenes that had followed the loss of the ring. Yes, grown folks were certainly queer!

Even Miss Lois had acted as if she, Lizabeth Bess, had been all to blame; whereas anybody could see that if Miss Lois had been careful and had kept the ring on her finger it never would have got lost!

Well, Miss Lois just shouldn't have that ring for a little while. She wanted to wear it and she was going to, too! She guessed it was her own brother's ring in the first place, and if he were here, he would let her take it! She'd keep that hand in her pocket; and if she should forget — well, she'd have some good of it, anyway!

Prudence, however, is said to be the better part of valour. So, upon going into the house, the finder of the ring hid it in a little vase on the parlour mantel. She would leave it there until she was "dressed up," then, when Mother sent her to get her white silk mitts, she would slip on the ring, (with the carnelian circlet for a guard), and triumphantly

wear it all afternoon! Even if the mitt did hide it, 'twould be there!

Just as the family were about to sit down to dinner, who should appear but Uncle Jim! The whole
family remarked how well he looked — and happy
— boyishly happy! "And prosperous?" added
Father, lifting questioning eyebrows, with a smile.
"Surely!" beamed Uncle Jim. "So prosperous
that I'm going to take a partner shortly!" And

"Surely!" beamed Uncle Jim. "So prosperous that I'm going to take a partner shortly!" And then he and Father shook hands: a very silly proceeding in Bess's eyes, for they had shaken hands when Uncle Jim came in, only a few minutes before!

Uncle Jim took the fourth place in the two-seated wagon with Father and "the child'n," while Mother, Gran and Bess drove Charlie, hitched to the top

buggy.

The Bradfords thought they would be early on the scene, but "Monument Park," as it was named, was crowded with people when they arrived. Stages from the surrounding towns had brought their quota, and quite a crowd had come down on the train from Hartford. This was honour, indeed! It was said that reporters from Hartford and New Haven—and even from New York, were on the ground; although no one seemed able to confirm this rumour.

Since Bess was to do the unveiling, it behooved her to "stay put" until called for; and this she had been ordered to do. Front seats had, of course, been reserved for the relatives of the dead soldiers, but Mother had insisted that Lois Horton sit with the Bradford family who, as relatives of "Miss Elizabeth Bradford," were placed directly in front of the speakers' platform beside the monument. Lois had demurred at first, but had been persuaded

to take the place in her reportorial capacity.

Suddenly the peanut man was heard crying his wares, and William jumped up, and started to find him in the crowd. And Miss Elizabeth Bradford jumped up and started after her brother, calling out that she would "be back in a minute!"

She would have been back in a very small fraction of a minute had not Mother's hand failed to grasp her skirts; but Mrs. Bradford assured herself that William would look after his sister, and that they would be back directly.

As it happened, William did not hear the child's hail, so he did not know that she was following him; the crowd enclosed her and cut off her view of him

before she had gone a rod.

It was hard work even for William to make his way around voluminous hoop-skirts, and big, booted feet. People made way, somewhat, for the smaller adventurer, who therefore covered the ground faster, and got farther and farther away in the direction she thought her brother had taken, while Mother sat at ease, in momentary expectation of their return!

CHAPTER XXIX

"NOT MISSING ANY MORE!"

ESPERATELY Miss Elizabeth Bradford made her way through the crowd. She must find William, and this was the way he had gone — or was it? Yes, there ahead she caught a glimpse of his brown jacket, and the sight spurred her to greater effort.

She pushed her way so determinedly that people, who might otherwise have thought her lost, made way for her, and let her pass. But now the brown jacket eluded her, and she in a panic, began to search the faces about her for one she knew, but there was none. Then it was that her mouth began to take on a piteous droop and her brown eyes to fill with tears.

"That little girl is lost!" she heard some one say, and this was the last straw. She had reached the edge of the crowd by now, but everything was unfamiliar. She was as much lost as when Chinney had found her by the roadside that day, so she stood still in her tracks, and lifting the little full skirt to her eyes, cried into it unrestrainedly.

"I believe the child is lost!" said a new voice, and one that was wonderfully pleasing. "Are you lost, sister?" the voice questioned, and she felt herself lifted up in somebody's arms. Hopefully she uncovered her eyes; but it was a stranger who held her; a stranger with a little book and a pencil in his hand. Even in her distress, she noticed that it was a shining blue pencil with silver lettering, the kind she wanted to have in her little green bag with the knife and the other things when she should be a schoolgirl.

"Are you lost, dear?" he asked again, and her

tears showered afresh.

"No, but Wee-um is!" she sobbed. "I c-can't f-find him! And I can't find M-Mother — and they want me back there to p-pull the r-rope and unveil the m-m-monument!"

"Well! Here is a how-de-do!" murmured the stranger, his reportorial instincts stirring. "We might have Hamlet without Hamlet; but an unveiling without an unveiler — never!"

The man, who had just come, and who was, as it happened, the "New York reporter," craned his neck in the direction of the monument which was still

swathed in white.

"The country's safe yet," he assured her, "but it's going to be a job to get back there through this crowd. Hark! What are they saying? They're calling for Elizabeth Bradford: Is that you?"

"That's me!" answered the excited Elizabeth with returning hope. "And I'm to pull the rope because Howell Bradford, my big brother — has his name on the monument. And oh! I hope I can get to see whether it says 'missing,' or 'dead,'" she added reflectively to herself.

"Howell Bradford," repeated the man. And

then he said it again, slowly and with knitted brows, as if he were trying to work out a puzzle. "Howell Bradford."

"Yes," said Miss Elizabeth, proudly. "Howell Harlan Bradford. Don't you think it's a nice name? Ruthie Taylor says the rest of us have just common names — Wee-um and Sara and me. But Howell Harlan," she lingered caressingly over the syllables, "is lovely, I think."

She looked down at the man from her perch on his shoulder. He did not look nice and pleasant any more; indeed, she began to be a little afraid of him as he shouldered his way through the crowd, apparently without seeing them, and muttered and

frowned to himself.

People began to turn and look after them.

"They've found her!" she heard people say. "That's the little girl they're calling for — the little Bradford girl, who is to do the unveiling."

"And the man who's carrying her is a reporter for the New York Tribune," a man remarked to

another.

Again little Bess looked down at her cavalier. "A reporter." Now, what was a reporter? Her bump of curiosity had not diminished with her advance in age; in another moment she would have asked him, but something of greater importance claimed her attention. The two rings had vanished from the finger on which she had placed them!

"Wait — Stop!" she cried, clutching his shoulder with the denuded hand. "We'll have to go back — I've lost something!" The pangs of a

guilty conscience assailed her: this was her punishment for not restoring the chain ring to its owner—now she had lost both it and her own!

"What is it that you've lost?" asked the man with a touch of impatience. "I'm afraid there isn't

time to go back, if they're waiting for you -"

"Oh, my!" squealed the child joyfully, "I forgot that I'd changed 'em to the other hand — I thought I'd lost my rings!" She held out a complacent right hand, upon the forefinger of which reposed the treasures.

The stranger caught her outstretched hand. "Where did you get this ring?" he demanded,

pointing to the gold circlet.

Bess, thinking he was accusing her, said hastily, "I'm going to give it right back!"

"But where did you get it?" he insisted, trying to

strip it from her finger.

"Don't take it off!" she cried in affright, knotting her hand into a hard little ball. "It's Miss Lois Horton's, and I want to give it back to her, right this minute. Don't take it off!" She looked anxiously up into the man's face to find that it was no longer frowning and impatient, but neither was it the smiling countenance that had bent over her a few minutes ago when she was lost. Now his eyes had the startled look of one suddenly and rudely awakened. He certainly was a funny man, and she wished he would hurry and take her back to Mother! She was about to tell him so, when he asked, with disconcerting directness, "What did Miss Lois Horton give it to you for?"

"She didn't!" confessed the culprit, ready to cry. "She lost it, and I wanted to wear it a little while because Howell Bradford was my brother, and it's his!"

The stranger lowered his burden until their eyes were on a level.

"Is your brother, sweetheart," he corrected.

"I am Howell Bradford — although I didn't know it till this minute. And is Miss Lois Horton here — and Mother — and the rest?" He was pressing her head down upon his shoulder, but Elizabeth Bess got a strangle hold upon his neck:

"Howell - Howell!" she faltered. "You are

not 'missing' any more!"

Pathos, when you can hide your head in the spare room pillow is one thing; but quite another when you have to display it to a crowd. So she winked off a couple of tears on Howell's shoulder, then lifted a proud little head to the gaze of the throng.

". . . Here comes Wee-um," she whispered gleefully; "won't he be s'prised, though, when we tell

him?"

"Don't tell him — let's find Mother first," the big brother whispered back. But even as his foot touched the low platform, before Mother or any of the others had seen him, a pair of long arms swooped down upon the youngster, lifted her from his shoulder, and set her down upon the little stage where the speakers were, at the side of the monument.

Placing the cord in her little brown, ungloved hand, (Mother saw this with extreme mortifica-

tion), "Now!" said the committee member, Mark

Dillon, in a forceful whisper.

As Miss Elizabeth Bradford slowly pulled the cord, you might have heard the little brook tinkling away off in the meadow. The previous speaker, one of note in that part of the State, had just concluded with the immortal words of Lincoln:

"— That this Government, of the people, by the people and for the people, shall not perish from the

earth --"

And the little girl, impressed by him, threw out her short arm with a pretty, baby gesture, and said in her clear treble,

> "Sleep, soldiers! Still in honoured rest Your truth and valour wearing!—"

As she ended, the feelings of her listeners, until now suppressed, broke out in a storm of applause, and the abashed vestal shrank back behind the drapery, out of sight of Mother's beckoning finger,

and stood there palpitating.

As the orator of the day resumed, telling in thrilling periods of the valour of those commemorated; of their "honoured rest," on distant battle field or in the peaceful plot which we so fittingly call "God's Acre" in their boyhood home, the child's heart swelled within her.

The speaker went over the list of names, making some brief comment on each, until he came to the name of Howell Bradford; when his eloquence soared aloft. He named the many battles in which the boy had taken part, and then, with a poet's

tongue, proceeded to voice the pathos of that saddest word—" Missing!"

Through a slit in the muslin Bess could see Mother's face growing white and wistful. No one had noticed Howell—one stranger more or less being negligible. Besides, his back was to the audience, and the lifting, curling folds of the flag all but enveloped him, as he stood waiting for the child to come and be lifted down.

She came: her scrutiny of Mother's face showed her it was time! Stepping in front of the speaker—"Wait!" she said, putting an arresting hand on his. "Howell Bradford isn't missing any more—here he is!" She ran to the edge of the stage, and held out her arms to her brother.

As Howell lifted her down and turned to where he had seen his mother — and Lois! — sitting, amidst the other friends, the exercises came to an abrupt close. Everybody within hearing rose with one impulse. They cheered, and cheered, and cheered again.

When Howell's mother at length released him, he and Lois looked into each other's eyes. What the man read in the girl's glance was a story of love and constancy almost without parallel, while his told of a re-awakening — of the supremely joyous ending of a search for some unknown but vital thing, that had seemed lost forever.

And Elizabeth Bess Bradford? Slowly, looking from one to another, she removed the little chain ring from her finger, and handed it to its owner.

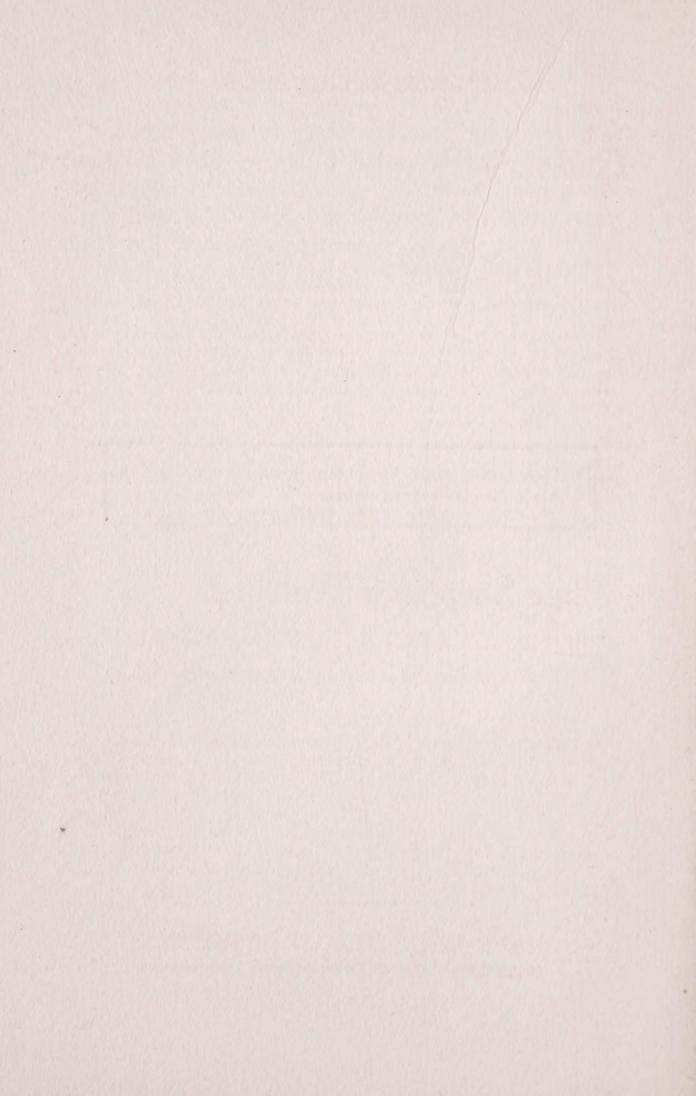
"There's your ring, Miss Lois," said she. "I found it to-day—and I found Howell to-day!" Regardless of the crowding neighbours, she swept her "fambly"—including Mother's "other daughter," with a beaming glance:

"Now, I guess we'll all 'live happy ever after '!"

said she.

THE END

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